AGING *and the* Art *of* Living

Jan BAARS

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Aging and the Art of Living

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Aging and the Art of Living

Jan Baars

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Aging and the Art of Living

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Introduction

> Philosophy is the art of life. CICERO

Do we need an art of aging? Is not aging something that happens naturally as long as you remain alive? Certainly, you continue to get older until you die, but what does that mean? One of the main messages of this book is that tracking people's ages in order to quantify their lives is a popular but overrated—and bureaucratic—approach to classifying people. Such classifications can have many important consequences, but age contains little meaning in itself. Disease and disability are not just the result of reaching a certain age but depend also on many other factors. Conversely, becoming older will not help you to face enduring problems more effectively or open up possibilities to enjoy life more deeply. To achieve these ends, we need to explore our own potentials and limitations and learn to contribute to a culture that stimulates and supports aging people to lead full lives. Developing an *art* of aging can help create such a culture.

As the number of aging persons grows, commercial and political entities are increasingly urging them to adopt certain lifestyles. If aging persons don't want to be pressured into adopting such lifestyles, they need to raise their voices in refusal. The voices and visions that may come from them will be diverse, and I know that my contribution as an aging philosophy professor will be only one among many. But there is strength in numbers, and, today, aging persons have larger numbers than ever before in human history.

Lives have become longer in what has been called "late modern society" (the basic structure and dynamics of the more affluent Western societies of the twenty-first century), but thinking about aging has not kept up with these developments. We have made progress in many respects, and many basic needs are met more efficiently than before, as demonstrated in rising life expectancies. Although aging has benefited from the developments of science and technology, it has hardly engaged with the long tradition of the *art of life;* consequently, this tradition has not been developed into an *art of aging*. This kind of art differs from the usual forms of art. The material used is not something outside of the artist, such as marble or canvas, but his or her *own life*. Moreover, the product can hardly be distinguished from the process: the art of aging is a lifelong process. However, at a more profound level there is a connection with other forms of art, for the materials of art are never only outside the artist: one is highly involved in one's artistic expressions, and if these efforts work out well, they may bring deep satisfaction.

The art of aging is not something that is intended to replace science or medical technology; we need an art of aging when our questions, needs, or problems can neither be answered or solved by science or technology in a broad sense, nor can they be satisfied by buying the many things that are on offer if one can afford them. In the historical perspective of this book, it will become clear that we have lost or failed to develop important qualities as we have become more successful in exercising technological control over nature both inside and outside us. In cultures that have much less technological control and where life is much more uncertain, such as premodern cultures, there is usually more creative attention to developing ways to confront what *cannot* be controlled. I will not dwell here on the many spiritual or magic rituals that can be found in such cultures, but I will reread ancient Greek and Roman philosophy with special attention to those approaches that went beyond theoretical discourse and aimed at philosophy as a way and an art of life. This will also give a context to the discussion of the possible meaning of *wisdom,* an idea that has survived the centuries and is still, though usually vaguely, associated with aging.

The ancient Greek and Roman approaches to philosophy as an art of life in search for wisdom did not evolve into an art of aging, although Cicero gave a famous first improvisation in his treatise *On Old Age (Cato Maior. De Senectute)*. After Cicero, there has been an abundance of thought about death, while questions about aging have been pushed to the margins. This can partly be

explained by studies in historical demography (Imhof 1986) showing that throughout history the spread of mortality over the various age categories was much greater than has gradually become reality in the rich countries. Because death was much closer to people of all ages in the past, it is understandable that much thought was given to death and little to aging. As long as relatively few people in a society reach old age, thinking about it will not be a priority. After Cicero wrote *On Old Age* in 44 BC, it was more than two thousand years before the next major philosophical work about aging, *On Old Age* (*La Veillesse)* by Simone de Beauvoir, was published in 1970 and translated in 1996 as *The Coming of Age*.

Although some interesting philosophical contributions have appeared during the last decades—such as Manheimer (1999), McKee (1982), Overall (2003), and, more recently, Helen Small's *The Long Life* (2007)—academic philosophy has continued to neglect aging. Whoever takes the time to go through the major contemporary philosophical handbooks and encyclopedias will find nothing under the heading of "aging." Moreover, the highly specialized and theoretical character of this academic profession has led to a neglect of philosophy as a way of life, although this tradition has remained vivid, with ups and downs, and has occasionally even led to some important texts about aging. Recent research into the history of philosophy has brought a fascinating collection of short texts and fragments about aging or "old age" to light, some of which were well hidden in libraries (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming).

While the prospect of death will continue to challenge our thought because of its profound finality, aging has gained such an important place in late modern societies that it can hardly be neglected any longer. However, all attention now appears to be absorbed by the practical problems posed by the aging populations of the rich developed countries (Hagestad and Dannefer 2001) such as health problems, pensions, or the organization and costs of care.

As a young professor of philosophy still in my thirties, I became challenged by the possibility of doing academic research on aging and began to read through the major publications on aging of the mid-1980s. I was rather shocked by the ways in which "the aged," "the elderly," or "the old" were portrayed as if they were a strange and utterly problematic species. If they needed care, this usually dominated all interest as if they had no other existence, even though delivering care might only take a fragment of their days. A one-sided focus on the instrumental aspects of care led to a neglect of the ways in which care should be embedded in the life of persons with dignity in their own right, not simply problematic beings needing care. One-sided negative images of

aging, though possibly well-intended, were not helpful in taking the persons concerned seriously, as if nothing could be expected from people who could not take care of themselves. Even when aging persons were fully able to care for themselves, they were often seen in terms of statistical probabilities: they would soon become dependent, and in that perspective they were already a potential burden. This colonized the future even of healthy aging persons, as if their only remaining option were to wait for a heart attack or a chronic disease to strike them. I began to see how the cultural syndrome that Bob Binstock (1983; cf. 2010) had called "compassionate ageism" had many faces but also that aging persons were not better off when ageism dropped its guise of being compassionate.

My sympathy and support went out to those few older persons who dared to raise their voices: *yes,* they were in a wheelchair and had to live in a nursing home; but *no,* they did not need anybody to think or decide for them—just somebody to communicate with them as they would with any normal person and to push the chair, *thank you.* Or it went to those who admitted that they were eighty or more years old but didn't need care, at least not more than other adults, and would like to be taken seriously. Even when the tone of the general debate changed to a new emphasis on the alleged selfishness of the aged—those "greedy geezers" who would all live so long with their high pensions, radiant health, and sun tans—it appeared that age-related generalizations with their supposedly scientific prestige could offer a solid ground for any collective character they were supposed to have.

Aging appears to evoke ambivalent cultural conflicts with deep roots in many layers of our late modern existence. On the one hand, it appears that negative generalizations about aging are a way to exorcise human vulnerability from young and adult life (supposed normalcy) and reserve it for those who have reached a higher age, so that life would seem safe. Thus, getting to a higher age is identified with pathological senescing. On the other hand, the overburdened "normal" adults tend to see aging as an indefinite extension of the short vacation they are longing for. Here, aging becomes identified with distorted, consumerist forms of a good life and defined as staying young, a denial of aging as living in finite time. Both tendencies not only deny the vulnerability of human life in general but also restrict the potential richness and fulfillment of later life. As a result, the continuity of life, or the interconnection between "normal" and older adults, is undermined, with detrimental consequences for both sides.

In these generalizations there is hardly any respect for *aging,* the different ways to lead one's life after having been defined as "old" by society, because one has lived for what is considered to be a relatively high number of years. Although aging takes place from birth to death, in this book I will use this term for the part of the life course that is set apart in late modern society for persons who have become "aged." The value of the terms *aging* and *the aged* is that they retain the connection with age (in contrast with such terms as *seniors, old(er), elderly,* or *elders*) and with the idea that the ways in which aged persons live or behave can be explained by their age. These pretensions will be critically inspected in the first chapter and will be shown to be largely unfounded. Consequently, I will first distinguish between *aging* and *reaching a higher age,* and second between aging as an intentional and potentially meaningful way to lead one's life and biological *senescing*.

What still strikes me is a widespread tendency to see the aged almost as another human species, demented or wise but not in a perspective of one's own possible future with all its uncertainties and promises. Such a perception of aging persons blocks the possibilities of really communicating with them and impairs not just the developmental opportunities of older persons but also of the young, since they are constructing their own future aging process as an utterly problematic and estranged one. This inability to identify with aging persons contrasts with a long cultural tradition and a longstanding philosophical reflection about what it means to *live in time*. The Greco-Roman tradition of philosophy as a way of life has partly been continued in the works of the philosophers I discuss in the fourth chapter, who try to clarify their personal experiences of living in time.

Encountering this many-layered conflict was also the beginning of a fascination with the problematic concept of *chronometric age* (also called "calendar age," but see chapter 6 below), which still serves as an important indicator of differences between persons or even as an explanatory force behind these differences. The exactness of measuring the time since birth seems to offer the ground for conclusions about persons of a certain age, although this is hardly the case. Over the last decades there has been increasing evidence of major inequalities in (healthy) life expectancies, which demonstrates that age is not as decisive as the many neat overviews of age-related diseases and decline suggested. Coming from an academic background in social theory and continental philosophy, I have been convinced from the very beginning that a critical approach to gerontology was badly needed. Since the late 1980s I

have had the privilege of working together with such eminent scholars as Dale Dannefer, Chris Phillipson, and Alan Walker, who shared and still share this conviction.

Although this already gave me enough food for thought about the more structural side of contemporary society, other, more philosophical questions emerged. Moreover, a critique which has not become a formal stance presupposes meaningful commitments (Baars, Dohmen, Grenier and Phillipson forthcoming), some of which have been articulated here. In that sense, this volume differs from the work I have published over more than two decades in the context of a "critical gerontology" (Baars 1991; Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006), where theoretical approaches and practical policies regarding aging are critically analyzed because of their implications for aging persons. This critical analysis remains important and is still present in the background, although in this book I will reflect more elaborately about some fundamental issues and concepts that are implicit not only in *studying* aging but also in speaking and thinking about aging *experiences*. Such a reflection can be called "philosophical" although it involves a broad interdisciplinary discourse of aging studies and does not stay within the limits of academic philosophy. Therefore, I often take the liberty of speaking of "us" and "our" because I try to clarify issues from the standpoint of somebody who is involved in these issues, not as an isolated expert who objectively studies the lives of certain populations but as somebody who tries to clarify his perspective in communication with others who are invited to read these pages with committed interest. The others—you, the reader—are not expected to agree. After all, disagreement and debate arise where common interests are at stake.

There has also been a more scholarly motivation to write this book. My academic teaching and research in the philosophy of the sciences and the humanities has helped me to see that studying aging is much more complicated than is still widely assumed: trying to understand processes of aging involves impressive interdisciplinary challenges. Not only genetic dispositions, but lifestyle, nutrition, sanitary conditions, medical care, and material and cultural environments must be taken into account as they change in interaction with each other, defying the notion of a static structure of aging or senescing (Baars 1991). In confrontation with these complications, it becomes easier to understand why age-related generalizations are so popular. The major gerontological conferences are still unique gatherings of scholars from different disciplines, although the complexity of doing interdisciplinary research is rarely

given adequate attention. Interrelating different disciplinary approaches presupposes a clarification of the most fundamental concepts that are shared by all approaches to aging, and "time" would certainly be among them.

This ongoing questioning of concepts of time (cf. Baars 1997; Baars and Visser 2007) used in the study of aging has confronted me with the cultural dominance of chronometric time not only in scientific paradigms but also more generally, since many processes in late modern societies, including important parts of the life course such as education, work, retirement, and professional care are organized from the perspective of chronometric time. However, chronometric time is just one, quite limited, way to conceive time. It has become so important because of its instrumental and calculative qualities, not because it gives any meaningful orientation.

We need to think about concepts and experiences of time that are richer than chronometric time. In this context it is crucial to acknowledge an *existential* dimension in aging that must not be confused with existential*ism:* a narrow focus on one's own individual existence. I will actually criticize this extreme narrowing of the existential perspective because many of the major issues of life emerge in relating to other people.

The Chronocratic Emperor Has No Clothes

One of the main issues I want to clarify in this book is how thinking about aging has become dominated by a specific form of time: chronometric, or clock time. This domination means that other forms of time may still be implicit but are not really taken seriously.

Measuring the time that people have lived has become part of a culture in which the age of a wide variety of objects—cars, clothes, expensive consumer items—is considered important. When persons reach a greater age, this is usually a cause for celebration, but otherwise awareness of age usually develops into a wish for replacement that has already been programmed into the production of objects. Such tendencies are a sign of deeper cultural trends: chronometric categories are not important by themselves but are *made* important by cultural macro-narratives that present acceleration, innovation, and "youth" as the only way forward. This leads to ageist prejudices or reinforces them. Generally, it is assumed that age plays an increasingly important role in accounting for behavior and situations of people, especially after they have crossed the threshold from so-called normality and entered the ranks of the

"aged." The other side of this coin is that these "aged" people have nothing more in common than a minimum age. This is not very informative, although the consequences of the distinction between normal adults and the aged can be serious enough. The exactness of chronometric measurements is made to suggest that chronometric age will give the most precise and objective information about persons of those suspected ages. This obstructs the acknowledgment of constitutive narratives about aging and reproduces them without any critical reflection. Every step in studying or even discussing aging already involves metaphors and narratives about living in time, and these often make a major contribution to the results of these studies without being openly discussed. The meanings of ages and aging are constituted in an interplay between more generally influential sociocultural macro-narratives and personal experiences. Thus, chronometric age is of secondary importance; it is just the time that has elapsed since someone was born.

Although the chronometric approach to time has instrumental value, it has by now taken a predominant position not only in government and other official bodies but also in late modern life worlds, where persons are thinking about the future or are encouraged to plan their lives. This overemphasis on chronometric time, as if this were the only temporal perspective to be taken seriously, amounts to a *chronometric reduction of time:* a narrow, calculating approach to time that is increasingly imposed on the way we lead our lives and think about them.

Throughout Western history, time has often been seen as something very simple, but it is actually hard to grasp. At the beginning of the twenty-first century we can see how time not only challenges our understanding but also plays a decisive role in our understanding of the world or universe in which we live. The interpretations of time in relativity theory, thermodynamics, and religious calendars and in the manifold personal experiences of *having* time, *being* time, or *living* in time call for a reflection about what time could mean in human aging and how we can open up its riches.

Overview

A short introduction to the individual chapters will give the reader a quick overview of the book. Chapter 1 focuses on chronometric approaches to the life course and to aging, approaches that not only lead to many important societal problems and inadequate associations or suggestions about human

aging but also block a meaningful understanding of what it means to live in time. The predominance of chronometric perspectives leads in late modernity to a one-sided focus on living longer, but since aging has scarcely been integrated as an important and dignified phase of life, aging well tends to be equated with staying young. This leads to a broad culture of anti-aging, which is discussed in chapter 2. Although this culture of aging as staying young is a contradiction in terms, it may help to break away from unfair prejudice and old-fashioned images of aging people that are unnecessarily limiting their actions. Nevertheless, most of this anti-aging culture tends to remain superficial and does little to advance the respect for aging persons and their dignity in late modern society and culture.

This leads to questions about whether cultures of the past might offer some inspiration for richer ways of aging. There would be many candidates for such a historical exploration, both within and outside Western traditions (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming). In this book the choice has been made to investigate what we can find in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy about aging, something that has not been explored before, although there has been important historical research of the societal and cultural contexts of these philosophies. In chapter 3 I explore what we might be able to learn from the texts that have been handed down to us by the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, who sometimes associated aging with acquiring wisdom. However, they respected wisdom too much to identify its acquisition with aging, as if this would come by itself if one lived long enough. For the ancient Greeks, wisdom had everything to do with clarity of thought and discussion, but philosophy was also a practical way of life that was taught in schools—for instance, in preparation for public office. In the work of Roman Stoics such as Cicero or Seneca, we can find a first, rather improvising, attempt to develop this Greek tradition of philosophy as an art of life into an *art of aging*. These first improvisations deserved to be developed further, since the Stoics showed too little consideration for the vulnerabilities of life or for material needs. Moreover, their perspective on living in time was dominated by the determination to live in the present, which is important in itself but reveals too little of aging as a process in which the present is intertwined with the past and the future. Alas, this early attempt at an art of aging has hardly been developed further, and the concept of time has primarily been elaborated in the context of physics as chronometric time.

In chapter 4 I discuss how the analysis of time as an instrument for measurement was intensified in the context of modern science, which idealized

Newtonian cosmology and developed an understanding of objectivity that is less problematic for studying cosmological movements than for studying processes and experiences that are more strongly influenced by human activity. Because of its relevance for senescing and aging, there is also a discussion of the question of whether time is reversible or irreversible. The first answer is likely to come from physics; the second tends to be given by the life sciences and agrees more with the way we tend to see human aging. However, in both scientific perspectives personal experiences of living in time remain unexplored. Although the first part of this chapter may seem to confirm the general idea about modernity and its scientific neglect of personal experiences, I will discuss in its second part modern philosophers who have tried to develop the personal experience of living in time and have even connected this with personal authenticity. This line of thought goes back to the early medieval theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo and leads to contemporary thinkers such as Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger. To achieve a deeper understanding of aging and the art of living with its opportunities and limitations, we need to include this personal search for *authenticity* and the significance of *lived* and *personally experienced* time, opposing the tendency to limit time to its chronometric variety, which is easily defined "objectively" as measuring aging and the aged.

Chapter 5 continues the discussion about aging as living in time with regard to narratives. Here I discuss such issues as narrative identity and the unity or linearity of narratives that are implied in (auto)biographies or life plans. Although *narrative integration* has been seen by important thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre as the most important heritage of Greek, especially Aristotelian, thought, I am looking for a different connection to the Greek and Roman art of life. This connection lies in the Socratic conception of wisdom, which emphasizes *reflection* and an ongoing *search* for wisdom. Such an idea of wisdom might still be important and inspiring in late modern culture to establish a culture of aging that might gain more respect in society. Therefore, I tend to emphasize narrative *practices* and the *reflexivity* that can go with them as the most important aspects of narratives instead of their descriptive completeness or integration.

The final chapter articulates perspectives to understand aging, not as a pathological process but as an existential one within the interhuman condition. Aging is basically seen as a part of life and not as something fundamentally different from normality. Because human life is always a unique process

of living in finite situations, I criticize approaches that identify finitude with mortality: finitude is a permanent condition of life and is deeply connected with the uniqueness of human lives. Within this context I discuss aging as having two major aspects. The first is a fundamental human vulnerability that increases as people age; it is not the monopoly of aging persons. Indeed, the *interhuman* condition of vulnerability radicalizes as people continue to age. This aspect is, however, connected with the second aspect: the possibility of an increasing deepening of experiences and understanding that has in many traditions been referred to as *wisdom*.

1

Chronometric Regimes

The Life Course, Aging, and Time

> Time is so precious in this realm. DANTE ON *PURGATORY*

Introduction

For most of us daily situations, experiences, and activities are under the stresses of time, more precisely, under *chronometric* stress. When we are in a hurry, when we must do too much in too little time, or when we would like to stay longer, we feel the pressing and pushing presence of time. Although time schedules can clash with our preferences, it would be hard for us to live without chronometric time. If a plane left only when the pilot felt like going, it would disturb normal activities. Where does the useful application of chronometric time begin, and where does it end and clash with processes or forms of meaning that are not preprogrammed according to time schedules?

To be able to clarify such issues, we must first define *chronometric time* as the time that is indicated by clocks and calendars, making it possible to measure the duration of a process or to locate in time an event like the birth of a baby, a future appointment, or the death of a person (Baars and Visser 2007). In most traditions the movements of the celestial bodies have been taken to represent time, defining years, seasons, months, day and night, hours and minutes. These movements of the earth around the sun and of the moon around the earth still

determine the general pattern of chronometric time, although the irregularity of these movements must occasionally be corrected (for instance in leap years) by the extremely precise clocks that have been developed over the centuries.

In traditional thought about time, we can still see that time has two important aspects. The first is its function as a general tool to measure the durations of processes and to locate them on a time scale. The second aspect is its embedding in narratives about the meanings of this temporal dimension in which all that is vitally important manifests itself and goes by, including the lives of unique human beings. One of the problems of our contemporary understanding of time is that it has become dominated by its function as a tool for measurement. Chronometric time has become more and more precise. The cesium atomic clock, for instance, is based on a cycle of over 9 billion vibrations during one (old) astronomical second (Baars and Visser 2007). No matter what the instrumental qualities of these different clocks are, time as a general tool for measurement must be based on processes that are not influenced by the processes it should measure. Therefore, the movements of the earth and the moon were excellent candidates to form the basis of a general time concept, since their regular movements are clearly independent of anything happening on earth. In other words, time as a general instrument of measurement is completely instrumental, detached, and empty. It is never short or pressing; it measures millions of years as easily as nanoseconds. The shortage of time or its pressure comes from elsewhere—for instance, from harsh and unrealistic forms of planning or from narratives of competitive efficiency.

Although it would be more difficult to coordinate our activities without a shared clock time, the question remains whether the way activities and processes are caught in a seemingly autonomous chronometric network has not begun to control or restrict the meaning and nature of what we do. The metaphor of "deadlines" might remind us that we could also live a good life with less chronometric pressure and with a stronger awareness of other times. The question is what place time should have in our lives and how we can develop a richer understanding of *aging*.

Many studies have already discussed how chronometric time shapes and dominates daily life. However, in this chapter I reflect on a matter that has not been discussed very much, namely, the temporal perspective on the life course, with an emphasis on the organization and understanding of aging. The term *life course* refers to the ways in which individual lives are organized and structured over time. This perspective profits from a prima facie credibil-

ity: since a society has by definition a larger time span than individual people, it must make provisions for a continuous succession of the generations, including education of the young and taking care of those who have done their share and have become "too old." It would make sense for a society to follow the natural phases of life if these could be distinguished clearly. Initially, during the development of embryos and very young children, there do appear to be relatively strong developmental sequences, at least in the case of children who are seen as normal. Thus, predictions can be made about at what age children will normally crawl, walk, or talk, given the right kind of support and stimulation from their environments, although even the development of the smallest children is seen differently in different cultures. In contemporary Western societies laws regulate basic phases of the life course, determining at what age a child must begin to attend school and how long this compulsory education takes; at what age a person may be formally employed, drive a car, make legal contracts, vote, or stand as a candidate in elections; and at what age someone is entitled to an "old age" pension.

The general structure is one of a quick extension of rights once compulsory education is over, followed by a reduction of these rights some forty years later. Although the legal rights and obligations may remain in force, many informal yet forceful mechanisms begin to weigh on central societal domains such as the labor market relatively early in life. After a phase in which age is not important because one lives within the space of "adult normalcy," age suddenly becomes an issue. If one is unfortunate enough to become unemployed, the stigma of the "older worker" will make itself felt at a relatively young age. Especially in later adult life, the regulation of the life course turns out to be a social and cultural issue: age-related categorizations of individuals mainly show how societies—or, rather, dominant societal forces with their specific interests—deal with the process of aging. In late modern societies policies are rationalized scientifically, usually by means of statistics and statistically based prognoses. Thus, all sorts of calculations begin to play an important role, and without much effort time and age can be included in them. The analytical opportunities that arise from these measurements are exploited, especially in the rationalization of production processes and the bureaucratization of activities, leading to lives that are pressurized by chronometric calculations.

In section 1.1, I give a short historical overview of the development of the modern life course under the parameters of industrial labor markets and the evolving bureaucratic regulations that are intended to mitigate or regulate

the harsh effects of industrialization. Both on an individual biographical level and on a societal level, modern life courses tend to become chronometrically structured, while the continuation of a traditional patriarchal orientation in modernity has important consequences for the societal status of care as such. The bureaucratic regulation of the modern life course begins with the protection of children from work, combined with the introduction of compulsory education, and moves on to regulate retirement age. The emerging institutionalization of the life course is briefly situated in a late modern context that is characterized by a constant tension between systemic worlds and life worlds.

According to many observers, the late modern life course might have become a de-standardized "choice biography." However, I maintain in section 1.2 that the late modern chronometric life course has not lost its momentum because the processes of de-standardization give rise to a more intensive chronometric registration of the relevant movements and transitions in the many databanks of the systemic worlds. This registration is not limited to ages but extends its grasp especially to the *durations* of activities and situations. In late modern culture there is a chronic lack of time and a pressure to gain more time by planning ahead and speeding up activities and processes. In section 1.3 I discuss some of the implications of these developments for the organization of *care,* one of the domains where the tensions between the systemic worlds and life worlds become apparent. Under a chronometric regime, care will constantly be reorganized, trying to make it more time efficient, and this policy clashes with some specific characteristics of care.

In 1.4 I will investigate whether studies of human senescing actually support the age-related strategies that form an important part of the late modern chronometric life course. Generally, it is assumed that age plays an increasingly important role in accounting for activities and situations of people as soon as they have crossed the threshold from "normality" to enter the ranks of the "aged." However, according to scientific studies, adult life is not governed by an unequivocal biological program determining "natural phases of life": there is no genetic program for human senescing (Kirkwood 1999). This does not prevent many researchers from developing *chronometrics of aging:* overviews in which the ages of populations are correlated with different qualities or the lack of them.

Section 1.5 concludes this chapter by articulating some major paradoxes of late modern aging. One of them is the paradox of the "younger older": on the

one hand, the rising life expectancies can be interpreted as a slowing down of processes of senescing; while on the other hand, a general cultural acceleration results in a progressive *societal* senescing, where people are seen as old at a younger age. This paradox however, also has another side that has emerged as an anti-aging counterculture of getting *older* while staying *young,* which is the subject of the second chapter.

1.1. Historical Backgrounds of the Chronometric Life Course

Contemporary social theorists of the modernization process such as Foucault (1990), Giddens (1990; 1991), and Habermas (1987) regard the decades around the turning of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century as an important transition period in the modernization process. Gradually, a new pattern of societal organization emerges: the rise, on the one hand, of an economic sphere with its own dynamics spreading across regions and countries, and, on the other hand, of national bureaucracies. Both of these had major implications for the organization of the life course. The early phases of modernization were marked by a gradual separation of labor and family, which meant that an increasing number of people had to prove their economic value on the markets of trade, and especially industrial work, while the traditional extended family or community was breaking up into smaller private domains of consumption rather than production. An important implication of these developments was that traditions were losing their grip on ways of living because life courses gradually became more individualized as the male individual had to fend for himself outside the family. Before, the reproduction of the traditional community itself—for example, the farmstead—was the continuous center of attention. In this community generations followed each other and transferred specific knowledge and customs. That situation can be characterized more adequately by the concept of a life *cycle,* in which generations come and go and thus enable the community to survive, than by the concept of a life *course* (Kohli 1985).

These social dynamics of modernization challenge or force the individuals to break away from their traditional communities. To the degree that an individual breaks away from tradition, his life is seen as a process with an independent biographical dimension and not just as a part of a larger common entity. The modern individual tends to see his life not as a repetition of traditional

ways but as a future-oriented development of his unique individual talents (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1973; Kohli 1985; Meyer 1986).

Meanwhile, in spite of all changes, a deeply rooted patriarchal tradition was continued in the modern organization of the life course, which was one of the reasons why it was structured around the working careers of men. According to this model, men were supposed to be the major societal actors: they would go out into the world to make a career or just to survive, but also to find a female partner who would take lifelong care of him and the children: "she would bear him," as the phrase was, so that he could come home and rule as a carefree paterfamilias after his daily struggle for social existence. This traditional patriarchal idea of a role division between men and women is aptly expressed by Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). In a long poem written around 1800, Schiller praises a church bell, that witness of the most important moments in people's lives: a child is baptized; a couple is married; a person is buried; the community struggles with fires or floods. Whatever happens, the church bell sees it all while the generations are passing by. The poet turns this elevated position into a lofty and wise perspective. Of course, this wisdom is strongly colored by the patriarchal convictions of Schiller's days, and especially his prosperous bourgeois milieu, although the transcendent position of the church bell suggests a more impartial overview:

> The man must go out
> In hostile life living,
> Be working and striving
> And planting and making,
> Be scheming and taking,
> Through hazard and daring,
> His fortune ensnaring.
> Then streams in the wealth in an unending measure.

He positions the woman indoors, where she reigns with all her diligence and prudence:

> And indoors ruleth
> The housewife so modest,
> The mother of children,
> And governs wisely
> In matters of family,

And maidens she traineth
And boys she restraineth,
And goes without ending
Her diligent handling,
And gains increase hence
With ordering sense. SCHILLER, *DAS LIED VON DER GLOCKE*

The female prudence amounts to teaching the daughters how to play their future role as wives and mothers. According to the poem, the mother has little to offer her sons: her task is restricted to restraining them—or, as the original German version has it, to "increase" them (*sie mehret die Knaben . . .*). In this patriarchal story there is only a secondary role for women. Not only was a woman's social status traditionally derived from that of her husband, but she was also confined to an idealized role of the mother who takes on the burden of care in a broad sense. In a similar way, Nancy Cott (1997) documents in her book about women in New England between 1780 and 1835 that a domestic "woman's sphere" and the ideal of a housewife emerged from the marginalization of women's economic roles after the expansion of mercantile capitalism and the industrial revolution. Although there have been many variations, the sketched developments reflect an important pattern in the early modernization of Western societies with major implications for late modern life courses.

A Biographical Sandglass

Schiller's lines breathe the spirit of modern capitalism and the Protestant work ethic that became interconnected in Max Weber's classic work as he explained how in certain early modern Protestant circles a moralizing and disciplining vision of individual life becomes dominant as a result of the religious elevation of worldly activity (Weber 1976). Weber claims that the Protestant champions of the new asceticism *in* the world (as opposed to the traditional outer-worldly asceticism in monasteries) strip everyday life of its planless and unsystematic character. Slowly but surely, daily life is organized according to a consistent method that controls all domains just as was the case in monasteries in earlier times (Foucault 1995). Typical of such a disciplining attitude toward one's own life are the pietistic and puritan diaries from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which meticulous accounts are given of how industrious and fruitful or how sinful, lazy, and idle one's days have been (Kittsteiner 1992).

The internalization of this new disciplinary regime comes with the development of a long-term perspective on one's own life: in modern morality, the traditional sandglass is not just the representation of the medieval *memento mori* (Remember, you are mortal) (Ariès 1977; 1983), but it begins to function predominantly as an ominous symbol of *time running out* while there is too much to do. Thus, work and working time become of central importance. This instrumental approach to working time has its effects on the perception of nonworking time. According to the work ethic, one should also make good use of these hours. This means that the working power must be regenerated, which presupposes an efficient use of time, with work and leisure in a tight balance. Weber conveys the merciless character of the doctrines of Richard Baxter or Benjamin Franklin: "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral damnation" (Weber 1976, 157ff.).

Instead of remembering that you are mortal, the message has become remember that you should make the most of your time. Not only at the end of life but also at the end of each day, week, or year, the puritan should give account of how he used his given talents. This ominous symbolism of an individual life running out in the sandglass, a life "infinitely short," confronts the industrious commoner with the amount of time already spent, of which an account must be given: one's own age. Such awareness of one's chronometric age marks modern individualism. In earlier times one celebrated the day of one's patron saint and derived one's place in the family, for instance, from the order of birth. Definitions of who is "old" and when "old age" has arrived have long been more dependent on the appearance and physical capacities of individuals than on chronological age (Thane 2005, 266). In modern society, however, the birthdays of individuals are celebrated, and their ages become important markers in a society that makes their well-being more and more dependent on the free play of the market. Although Adam Smith still claimed in 1776 that the market would ensure the optima of both personal development and societal progress through the market's "invisible hand"—or, rather, through the self-interests of its participants—some of the consequences of early capitalism were quite worrisome to others.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, philosophers began to reflect on the disruptive changes that were taking place in social and cultural

orientations as communities that were based on traditions and habits became confronted more and more with such modern forces as market dynamics and bureaucratic regulations. In his 1821 *Philosophy of Right,* Hegel noted the devastating effects of the new societal dynamics that led to an "amassing of wealth" on the one hand and a new "dependence and distress of the class tied to work" on the other (Hegel 1991, par. 243). He tried to develop a new "ethical totality" that was supposed to reconcile the fundamental contradictions through the state, a proposal that outraged Karl Marx, who could only see a real change by transferring political power from the state to those who lived in poverty and distress although they produced the wealth of the capitalists (Marx 1992). Marx had read in 1845 the work of his friend Friedrich Engels about the terrible conditions of the working class in England (Engels 2009), especially in the centers of early industrialization such as Manchester and Liverpool. Engels recounts that after the introduction of mills in the industrial town of Carlisle more than 47 percent of the children died before reaching the age of 5, and more than 12.5 percent of adults died before age 39. Marx's indignation about these social conditions, still visible in his later, more analytical work, *Capital* (1992–93), gave a voice to the experiences of many workers and inspired them to protest against these situations. During the nineteenth century these consequences of the "free," yet far from harmless, "play" of the market forces were the cause of major political struggle by the workers and others with a social conscience. The age-related organization of the life course was partly a way to organize the necessary education and hence the productivity of the population but also an attempt to mitigate the harshness of industrial capitalism through bureaucratic arrangements that focused on the chronometric age of individuals.

These bureaucratic arrangements had been made possible by the Napoleonic regime, which gave the bureaucratic supervision of the population in many European countries a boost through the introduction of several new institutions at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These entailed the registration of all citizens through gradually expanding and differentiating governmental institutions. Before that time, life events such as births, marriages, and deaths had been recorded for centuries, but only at the local level of church registers on parishioners (Imhof 1981; 1986). This type of registration was limited to a small number of events that played a central role in the religious community. It was far from a systematic chronometric registration of entire populations. The Napoleonic Code of 1804 was truly pan-European in

its ambition and inspired governments in all parts of the world to introduce similar institutions. The new civil legal system was accompanied by the overall and continuous registration of the entire population, something far more ambitious than the occasional censuses carried out in the Roman Empire. The goal, however, was basically the same: the formation and financing of Napoleon's armies by means of conscription and taxes.

Age in Social Legislation

The overall registration enabled later governments to develop age-related legislation. During the nineteenth century, but even more in the twentieth, social laws were gradually developed to arrange some protection for those individuals who could barely survive the harsh conditions of industrial society. Typical problems were child labor, disability, unemployment, poverty, and illness. In approaching these social problems, the basic idea regarding the life course was that children should be protected, adults might be helped for some period of time but should take care of themselves, and "old people" should be supported for the short time they would remain alive. The regulations that were developed to address these issues were built on chronometric age and gave it a new social meaning. One of the first stages of this process was that child labor (i.e., child labor outside the family, for example, in factories and pits) was gradually regulated and eventually forbidden, a slow process of change with many differences between countries. In the Netherlands a child labor act of 1874 prohibited children under 12 years of age to work in factories, a rule that was, however, only implemented by the Act on Compulsory Education of 1901. In England the 1847 Factory Act aimed at restricting working hours of women and children between the ages of 13 and 18 years to ten hours per day. The 1883 Factory Act stipulated that children aged 9 to 13 were not allowed to work longer than nine hours a day. Basically, these regulations could already be found in the 1833 Factory Act, demonstrating that the proclamation of new laws did not imply that situations would directly be changed but that such new regulations needed to be embedded in their social contexts. In the United States "oppressive child labor" was only declared illegal by the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act.

A next step was the government's organization or regulation of financial support for workers who had become too old to do their work, which was usually physically overburdening. For most people, labor and the general conditions of life were so harsh that relatively few survived to reach retirement

and hardly anybody did so in good health. In 1889 the first state pension, introduced by Bismarck, was granted at the age of 70 years (Kohli 1985), and other Western countries gradually followed with their pension acts. These scant rules to protect the vulnerable young and old from market mechanisms eventually led to a new, chronometric life course in which childhood, active adulthood, and old age became defined by age.

In historical perspective, the age-related regulation of the life course can also be seen as an attempt to give social life some orientation after the earlier traditions were undermined. The general aim was to allow the labor market to function optimally and, especially in the later phases of the modernization process, to make sure that the working population was given the necessary education to advance productivity. At the same time, all-too-problematic effects of market mechanisms, such as child labor and old-age poverty, later also disability and unemployment, were avoided or alleviated so that these would form no threat to the loyalty of the workers. The major part of this programmed route consisted of forty to fifty years of labor, preferably for the same employer. Finally, there might be the reward of retirement, the worker's equivalent of a carefree old age, the Ciceronean *otium cum dignitate* (idleness with dignity), that was previously the privilege of the elite, in particular the feudal elite. Most workers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked forward to this period of inactivity in vain and died before they could reap their pensions. This ideal, of entering a "carefree old age," usually at between 60 and 65 years of age, has only become a reality for the majority of people since the 1950s and 1960s.

Late Modern Systemic Worlds and Life Worlds

Soon after these years, Western societies became caught in accelerating processes of global change that are difficult to grasp clearly (Baars 2006a) and would at least require an independent study. One aspect of these changes that is clearly relevant for a discussion of aging refers to the changes that become visible in the heterogeneous life worlds in which persons live with each other as they enter and leave personal relationships, raise children, and grow older. These changes are especially intriguing in a historical perspective because humans have always been mating, raising their children, and aging, so there must also be continuities among the changes. Even in de-traditionalized late modern societies, we might therefore still be able to learn something from certain traditions.

In a way, the different life worlds are the contemporary form of the traditional communities that had to change their ways as they became drawn into the modernization processes. Early twentieth-century founders of sociological theory such as Ferdinand Tönnies (2001), Max Weber (1997), and Emile Durkheim (1997) were still struggling to understand the historical changes that had taken place in the transition from premodern communities (*Gemeinschaft*) to modern society (*Gesellschaft*).

For Habermas, the modern transition from a "community" to a "society" still forms the historical background of *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) and the basic problems of contemporary society he analyzed in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987). Although he remains critical of late modern society and its overemphasis on instrumental and functionalist rationality, his critiques are not as massive as those by Adorno and Horkheimer, his predecessors in Critical Theory. He accepts the necessity of instrumentally oriented economic markets and bureaucracies but struggles with the problem of how they can be kept in check by the people they should be serving, which is still the basic idea and problem of democracy. He argues that the *systemic* world, which is basically composed of an economic and a political system guided by instrumental and functionalist types of rationality, increasingly dominates "the life world": the interpersonal domains where people live and interact with each other without being primarily led by economic profit or bureaucratic rules. This domination is referred to as a "colonization" of the life world (Baars 2006; Baars and Thomése 1994).

Although both Habermas's conception of the life world and, especially, the *intermediate* level between the systems world and the life worlds, deserve to be developed further (Baars 2009), his general analysis of contemporary society can help to clarify some fundamental issues regarding aging in late modern society. During the modernization process many activities that were carried out, for better or for worse, within traditional communities have been subjected to processes of professionalization and formal regulation. Instead of educating children within the community, we now have schools, colleges, and universities; instead of nursing people at home, we have highly specialized systems of health care. Partly, these subsystems have been developed so that people who would otherwise be busy in the community will have more time to be active in the economic system, and partly, it is because such activities as education or cure have become more complex and ask for professionalization and specialization. In many respects these processes have brought improvements, but

they have also robbed the elders of the positions they had as teachers or possessors of medical knowledge (Achenbaum 1978).

Most importantly, these developments have resulted in a more or less permanent confrontation between the life world and the systemic world. Even in the private home we are confronted with the systemic world in the form of telephone and television companies, insurance, rent, or mortgages; and as soon as we leave our homes we are confronted with the systemic world that organizes contemporary traffic (building and maintaining roads, enforcing regulations, etc.). In dealing with the systemic world we have to present ourselves in ways that will be acknowledged by these systems; often we are recognized as a mere number in a databank. This tension between systemic worlds and specific life worlds affects personal lives deeply: many of the personal and interpersonal issues that concern people most directly are subjected to systemic organizations and professional expertise. This is true for practically all important phases, transitions, problems, and conflicts that take place between birth and death: the education of children, work, dealing with conflicts between people, being seriously ill, or caring for those who are ill. As a result, the late modern organization of the life course is characterized by a constant tension between, on the one side, the *systemic* worlds of bureaucratic organizations, corporations, justice, government, and health care, and, on the other side, persons who are concerned about specific others in their *life worlds*. Although it will not always be mentioned explicitly, this tension will constantly be working in the background of the following discussions about late modern life courses and aging. This diagnosis of a deep and manifold tension between systemic worlds and life worlds does not, however, imply an idealization of premodern or early modern communities. Historical studies tell us that many children and old people lived in horrible situations and that there is no reason to mourn the loss of a golden age of spontaneous, selfless care (Cole and Edwards 2005; Hareven 1996; 2001; Laslett 1984).

1.2. Chronometric Life Courses: Beyond Standardization and De-standardization

During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, the policies aimed at protecting children and older people from the harshness of industrial capitalism gradually led in many Western countries to what Martin Kohli has called a "chronologically standardized 'normative life course' "

(1986, 272). Although there has been some historical criticism (Grillis 1987), Kohli's analysis has been fruitful in many debates about the life course (Levy et al. 2005; Settersten 1999, 2003; Vickerstaff 2006) because he articulates an institutional approach that includes both structural developments and biographical orientations regarding the life course. The latter have, for instance, been documented in Howard Chudacoff's *How Old Are You?* (1989), which showed how consciousness of age had developed since the late nineteenth century, resulting in relatively strong and broadly shared ideas about one's position along the life course according to age and in the age-segregating pressure to "act your age."

In the last two decades, life course research has seen an enormous expansion, documented in series such as *Advances in Life Course Research* and in several handbooks (e.g., Mortimer and Shanahan 2004). Of course, it is not possible to give an overview of these developments or to do justice to all the discussions that are going on; the aim of this section is merely to show how chronometric approaches are changing the ways in which life courses are organized.

The degree to which the organization of the life course leads to its tripartite standardization (preparation/education, activity/work, retirement) depends not only on the ways age-related laws are applied to a population through bureaucracies that control how long children must go to school before they are allowed to work and at what age "old age pensions" should make an end to active life. It also presupposes the development of other aspects such as the rise of life expectancies to a level at which a majority of people actually reach retirement ages. Although the relevant social legislation had been there for some time, the standardization of life course appears to have been fully developed during the 1960s as retirement became a reality for a majority of people (Kohli 2007). During these years there was a relatively high uniformity of movements and transitions over the life course, supported and encouraged by governmental age-related policies. Personal relationships were generally characterized by the sequence of marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing and would typically result in one lifelong marriage; and in the labor market, men were full time and lifelong employed, while their wives would primarily take care of the household. This pattern of uniformity was accompanied by relatively strong convictions about the "meaning" of age, in the sense that one should be in a situation that would be "fitting" one's age (Hagestad 1996)).

Of course, the "standardized life course" is a generalizing model that has

mainly been discussed in relation to Western societies, with some exceptions such as Leisering's (2002) exploration of the life course in China. In poorer countries, life expectancies did not rise as much, and there were fewer means to make a life phase of retirement possible for those who lived long enough, although this does not imply that these societies cannot have their own varieties of standardized life courses. But also within the Western world a minority of children still had to work, workers continued educating themselves and sometimes worked beyond retirement age, and some women had impressive careers. Moreover, the general form of standardization hardly applied to the rich and famous elite or the poor minorities; especially the latter tended to develop their own varieties of a standardized life course. In some poor minority subcultures a standardized life course has developed in which it would be normal for women to have their first child when they are 13 years old and become grandmothers when they are not yet 30 (Burton 1996; Dannefer 2003a). Also it appears to be normal, in some street gangs, for members to go through a compressed life course, proceeding from being a Homeboy to becoming a Tiny Gangster and later an Original Gangster, and ending up as a Veterano in their thirties. Around this age they will also have reached their maximum life expectancy (Bing 1992). Discussions of standardization and de-standardization of life courses generally neglect such specific forms as they seek to typify major patterns in Western societies.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Western societies went through important changes, leading to what has been referred to as postmodern society, although this is a less adequate term than late modern society (Baars 2006a). Although industrial productivity remains important, in late modern society there is a faster proliferation of new technologies that accelerate change in practically all spheres of life, from communication to health care, traveling, education, or work. Many types of work change from activities that are physically over-burdening but under-burdening in a mental or cognitive sense, into activities that may lead to physical under-burdening but to mental or emotional over-activity or even over-burdening. Although heavy physical work still exists, many forms of work bring agreeable intellectual, entrepreneurial, emotional, or artistic challenges, and some of these can be so satisfying that many people would prefer not to retire from their work. Such a wish made little sense for the industrial or agricultural worker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who would probably be worn out when approaching retirement if he lived to see it at all. The dialectics of

protection and restriction that are unfolding around retirement still differ, however, because the motivation and ability to continue to work and to stay healthy appear to be strongly socially stratified (O'Rand 2006).

Some less appealing challenges of late modern societies include a heightened risk that one's job or the market demand for some specialization might suddenly disappear. Continuing to work may require additional training, or it may even be necessary to begin a completely new line of work. The organization or corporation where one used to be employed may suddenly go bankrupt or be taken over by another corporation that employs mainly workers in low-wage countries. Such changes are accelerating as new technologies also allow the acceleration of decisions about investment, production, and marketing. As a result of such developments, there may be multiple careers over the life course, a lifelong need to learn new skills, and a retirement that does not take place at a fixed age but depends on the employability of the person concerned. Some will continue to work in the same job beyond retirement age, others will retire early, and still others will re-enter the labor market in other jobs (Henretta 2001; O'Rand and Henretta 1999). Not only do workers migrate on a global scale, but retirees also move to other states or even to other countries, like the North European *pensionados* who live in Spain or Portugal (Uhlenberg and Mueller 2004; Vincent 1995, 2006).

In the domain of personal relationships, life courses have also become more diverse or assumed other typical sequences such as cohabitation before marriage. There may be multiple partnerships or a "serial monogamy" over the life course; children may thus experience more parental figures and have a greater variety of relatives. The educational system has also become more diverse: many institutions are less exclusively focused on the education of the young, and older people embark on academic studies much more easily. Such developments were for Neugarten and Hagestad (1976) early indications of an "age-irrelevant society," and Held (1986) concluded ten years later that the life course had been "de-institutionalized." In his overview of two decades of research regarding the institutionalization of the life course, Kohli (2007) concludes, however, that while there have been some changes, partially caused by more female participation in the labor market, they should not be over-dramatized. Even in the United States, where mandatory retirement has been abolished, the preferred retirement age (60 to 65 years) has remained unchanged between 1965 and 1996 (Settersten and Hagestad 1996a, 1996b).

Some authors, such as Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991), Zygmunt Bauman

(1997), or Ulrich Beck (1992), have highlighted the fluid character of late modern society, emphasizing that individuals are overburdened with *choices* rather than being confronted with a regulated life course. There is little doubt that late modern individuals have to constantly choose, over the course of their lives, about everything from education to primary relationships, from types of work to places to live. This is where theorists such as Giddens, Beck, and Bauman are partly right: individuals have to choose from their options, and if they don't choose, others will choose for them. Moreover, they must assume the consequences of their choices and cannot hold others responsible for them.

There is, however, an important ambivalence in these theories that can also be found in Giddens's concept of the "trajectory of the self" and Beck's theory of reflexive individualization (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; cf. Baars 2006a). The basic phenomenon they try to articulate in these theories is that individuals must make their own decisions without being able to rely on traditions or authorities (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This *moral* condition of "individualization," which is basically a combination of new moral *obligations* and a moral *uprooting,* has, however, become mixed up with an *empirical* interpretation suggesting that every individual would be equally able or equally unable to construct her or his life. The moral evaluation that every individual must decide and act on his own cannot, however, support the conclusion that each individual is in fact "the architect of his or her life": the *options* that you can choose from cannot be chosen, and they are distributed unequally. Individual actions are always interactions with others in contexts that are both enabling and restrictive, so that the individual's actions are in many ways influenced, restricted, or pre-programmed by societal structures and agencies, although they are not completely determined by them. Taylor (2010) concludes in his overview of cross-national trends in work and retirement that decades of research tempers optimism that older workers would have real choices over the circumstances in which they work or retire and that many gradual retirement schemes actually promote early retirement instead of facilitating a more gradual withdrawal from the labor market.

The growing popularity of perspectives that underline a contemporary "choice biography" in contrast to a former "standard biography" in many recent discussions of life course policies is striking. The Economic and Social Research Council of the European Union has initiated extensive research on this issue, and the idea that individualization and choice have assumed a new

predominance has spread more widely in sociological analysis (cf. Brannen and Nilsen 2005). It seems ironic that at a time when societies have become so overwhelmingly complex, individuals would be able to choose their biographies; whereas in the past, when life was simpler, they had to comply with standardized life courses.

Generally, the idea that one is able to choose one's life course is attractive, especially when presented as the opposite of a more traditional standard biography. The choice biography implies the alluring suggestion that, as a critical consumer, it is important to resist others who could prescribe how one is to live. The opposition between a choice biography and the standard biography suggests that it would even be *possible* to live a standard life, whatever that could be in the rapidly changing circumstances of contemporary society. Or it suggests that these two concepts refer to subsequent phases and that the standard biography is a thing of the past. But this would mean that every contemporary biography would be a choice biography.

More deeply rooted ideas resonate in the praise of "choice." In some interpretations, choice becomes mixed up with the Enlightenment idea of human autonomy as "rational self-determination," according to which the individual discovers his rational potential and begins to determine himself rationally in opposition to an irrational world that has to be conquered. This is basically Descartes' idea of a rational being that sets out to become the master of the "outside reality." Sometimes we get the impression that this rational individual could create itself or, like a Baron Münchhausen, pull himself from the mire of irrational nature by his own hair and take on a rational essence. This type of rationalist pretension is especially problematic when the time perspective moves from fairly clear actions to complicated and essentially unpredictable developments within the span of human lives. In late modernity, the market cultivates the illusion that everything can be bought and that choices would be unlimited for those who can afford them.

Some limited forms of self-determination may be feasible, but although we must, as responsible individuals, choose and plan, there is often a lack of the most needed information, influence, or power to make adequate decisions and realize life plans accordingly. Moreover, the fundamental uncertainty of the future limits the ability to plan ahead. Choices are inevitable but also limited, as we can learn from the fate of the many fascinating but inadequate attempts at a prognosis of the future. In other words, you have to choose, but you cannot determine the outcomes; your personal choice is just one ingredi-

ent besides good or bad luck, actions and experiences of relevant others, and systemic developments and crises. Moreover, the view that a biography and an identity can be chosen at liberty is incompatible with their embedding not only in societal structures but also in narrative traditions, as discussed in chapter 5.

Here, I want to distinguish more clearly between structural characteristics of the ways in which lives are organized at a societal level (life course) on the one hand, and individual "biographies" on the other. There are tensions between norms that regulate age-specific choices and those that call for individual autonomy as well as tensions between somebody's ability to choose and the socially stratified opportunity structures that limit the options one can choose from. The suggestion that we are overburdened with free choices tends to block a view of the societal backgrounds of the "choice biography" as if there were no structural dynamics that influence life courses and lead to major inequalities (Dannefer 1999b, 2003a; Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006; O'Rand 2006). In many situations around the world, and even in the rich Western countries, many people are just trying to survive in situations that leave them little choice. The idea that humans should be respected in their fundamental rights and capacities to choose freely must not be confused with the actual possibilities of exercising this capacity—for otherwise the idea of freedom loses its critical contents and will fit all situations alike.

Perhaps one of the main reasons that the idea of a chosen biography has gained so much support is the ideological role it plays in the restructuring of social security that has been taking place in many Western countries. Not only in European welfare states but also in the United States, the transition from *defined benefit* to *defined contribution* schemes serves the same strategic purpose: to shift risks that were formerly assumed by governments or corporations to individuals (Dannefer 1999a). The flip side of the chosen biography is an individualization of the risks of life that holds every individual responsible for his or her situation: when somebody runs into trouble, he or she should have chosen differently (Baars 2005).

The debate about the (de)standardization of the life course has a sharp edge, since it touches governmental concerns over the viability of the material arrangements that were developed in connection with some major age-related regulations, especially the laws that would guarantee income for citizens who have reached retirement age. The standardized life course with its fixed retirement age was the product of powerful political processes, and as the dream

of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries finally materialized after the Second World War, it gradually became clear that demographic developments broke through former expectations. When Louis Dublin calculated in 1927 that the maximum life expectancy would lie around the age of 65 years (Oeppen and Vaupel 2000), the cost of public pensions looked rather manageable, but as life expectancy increased and relatively few children were born to compensate for the many retirees, new calculi were made with many important social, political, and economic consequences. Even the West European welfare states have been retreating from the arrangements that were attached to the standard life course, although not in all countries to the same degree.

In spite of such variation from earlier life expectancy calculations, leading to calls for de-standardization, we cannot conclude that the tendency to use chronometric time in calculating the parameters of life course politics has disappeared or even weakened. On the contrary: the *ages* of the persons who are involved and the *durations* of their employment as well as the time that is left until the official retirement age (with its expected benefits) usually play an important role in the strategies and calculations of the actors involved. The late modern institutionalization of retirement does not imply a "chronologically *standardized* 'normative life course,'" as has been proposed by Martin Kohli (1986, 272); that is, the chronometric aspects of the life course should be distinguished from its *standardization*.

The overemphasis on chronometric time leads to a late modern *chronometric life course:* the tendency of governments, organizations, institutions, and individual actors to perceive and organize the temporal dimensions of human lives predominantly from the perspective of chronometric time. To sustain this thesis, I argue that (1) chronometric *age* is still important in such central domains of society as the labor market, and (2) the chronometric life course has become more intense as chronometric *durations* are playing an increasingly important role in life course calculations, even if this leads to its de-standardization.

The Continuing Importance of Chronometric Age

The idea of a postmodern life course in which age would become less relevant (Hockey and James 2003; Myles, 1992) appears to be more adequate for *personal* relationships, as traditional family patterns become much less dominant and lifestyles of retirees have changed drastically (Gilleard and Higgs 2000; 2005), than for education and employment (Kohli 2007). However, age-structuring may have different levels. Settersten and Hagestad (1996a, 1996b)

found that the informal age structuring was stronger in the family sphere than in the sphere of work and education to compensate for a lesser formal age structuring in the family (Hagestad 1986). They also concluded that men's lives were more rigidly structured by chronometric age than were women's lives. There are other indications that chronometric age has not lost its importance. In education, chronometric age is obviously still relevant since it is used to determine whether one has access to certain forms of education or scholarships. But just as societies organize ways to educate children to prepare them for active adult lives, they tend to regulate the later part of the life course, especially when a relatively large part of the population counts as "aged."

Chronometric age has been institutionalized as an official parameter of the life course by assuming that major issues such as education, retirement, or social benefits can be optimally planned and organized with the help of statistical overviews of connections between the ages of citizens and other characteristics, based on certain assumptions about aging processes. Guided by changing political and economic realities, these institutionalized chronometric calculi may lead to a more or less continuous de-standardizing and re-standardizing of the life course. The results may seem to be flexible for politicians who can change important parameters of the life course, but not for those who are at the receiving end where chronometric distinctions leave little room for flexibility: somebody is 65+ or not; qualifies for a certain benefit or not; for a precise period of time and not a day longer. Changes in status along the life course thus acquire an artificial precision that is otherwise only found at New Year's celebrations, where the point is to bring the festivities to a culmination. In bureaucracy there is a joyless and indifferent regime; by a single tick of the clock, one finds oneself in another category.

Beyond the life worlds where people encounter each other personally, chronometric age is typically used to distinguish persons who have become "older" (as if this is not happening constantly). Here also, chronometric age serves as a pseudo-exact labeling device that has been programmed by ambivalent cultural trends that are easily obfuscated by it. Although life expectancies have been rising and senescing has even been advertised as a problem of the past, late modern society has lowered the age at which people are portrayed as aged but has also, paradoxically, developed a booming commercial culture of anti-aging—discussed in the next chapter—to compensate older adults for being driven out of "normal" adulthood. The lowering of the age of entry into the

legion of "older" people began when the average age of exit from the labor market dropped following the recession of the 1970s (cf. Kohli et al. 1991). For a variety of reasons, ranging from intentions to reduce youth unemployment to getting rid of the most expensive workers, people were exiting from the labor market many years before their official retirement age. This does not, however, imply that age has lost its importance.

Before the Great Early Exit of the 1980s, it was customary to speak of a beginning of "old age" when the official retirement age (usually around 65 years) had been reached. But nowadays, persons who have lived for fifty years are already invited to join organizations such as *AARP,* formerly the American Association of Retired Persons, or one of the many national organizations that are active in the member states of the European Union. A wide range of organizations such as the Red Hat Society promise to support the sudden weakening of the "aged" with age-specific benefits and pleasures that may partly compensate for the negative effects of the age-related segregation they paradoxically emphasize. The new 50+ (or 55+) definition of older people caught on and remained popular, even when the economic situation changed during the 1990s and older workers were again in full demand on the labor market. The media confront us with reports about the things these 50+ persons are doing, what they prefer, desire, are still capable of or not anymore, as if this category of people were not extremely large and heterogeneous. Becoming older is not identical with being retired; it is an age-related status acquired relatively early that may seem harmless to one who remains employed but can strike hard as soon as people become unemployed.

Although the Great Early Exit was the effect of broader economic developments and not caused by underperformance of those who retired so early, it has led to a problematic redefinition of older persons, especially older workers. There appears to be a broadly shared suspicion in the labor market that workers who have crossed the 50+ line are not functioning well. The chronometric operates here with short and swift categories, where every + (as in 55+, 50+, or even 45+) refers to a reduction of status for the persons concerned. It has even become customary to speak of people who are older than 40 as "older workers." In France, the normal age for definitively leaving the labor market has become 55, and workers in their 40s are seen as "nearly old," which puts them at a disadvantage if they become unemployed (Guillemard and Argoud 2004). In recent years, anti-age discrimination legislation has been introduced in the

EU to fight these developments, together with the European Equal Treatment Directive and the Barcelona and Stockholm targets for the employment of older workers (European Council 2001, 2002).

Encouraged by programs of "Active Aging" (OECD 1998; WHO 2002) but even more by growing concern about population aging and the rising costs of pensions, most Western countries have developed programs that are meant to keep older workers employed. Because these policies focus on chronometric age, they tend to neglect major differences in labor market positions. Many of the highly educated, well-off older workers are happy to continue to work and to comply with Active Aging programs, whereas less fortunate workers of the same ages often cannot wait to retire. The policies to reduce or remove both social protections for and restrictions on aging workers that have been developed in the last decades of the twentieth century work in favor of highly educated workers with relatively high income and interesting work.

Some countries, helped by a period of economic growth during the first years of the twenty-first century, have almost managed to return to participation levels of older workers as they were before the Great Early Exit of the 1980s. However, even governments often have a hard time fighting ageist practices in the labor market—including their own practices as employers—and the labor market position of older workers tends to fluctuate with the general economic situation. Opportunities to update their skills or retrain for other occupations tend to diminish as soon as they have reached the status of older worker as a result of calculations regarding the expected duration of future employment (Baars 2006b).

Even in the United States, however, where mandatory retirement does not exist, persons over 40 are referred to as "older workers" (Henretta 2001), and they have the lowest rates of re-employment, typically in part-time positions or jobs with low skill and training requirements, resulting in large wage losses (Chan and Stevens 1999; Hirsch, MacPherson, and Hardy 2000). In her overview of the research on the relationship between age and job performance in the United States and elsewhere, Melissa Hardy (2006) concludes that this research generally fails to include contextual factors, thus resulting in little understanding of the relationship that should be clarified (Avolio 1992; Czaja 1995). The main reason is again a narrow focus on chronometric age, although age accounts for only a fraction of the differences in performance between workers (Avolio, Waldman, and McDaniel 1990). Here again, there are important differences between people: some retirees will only find em-

ployment bagging groceries or greeting customers; others will be able to take up a new enterprise while they collect a solid pension from an earlier job. Such successful examples do not prove that there are no age-related pressures as a result of early societal senescence; rather, it appears that it takes special qualifications or a favorable economic position to be able to withstand these ageist pressures without negative consequences.

Knowing the chronometric age of persons can be quite informative in many contexts because ages can easily be related to certain characteristic circumstances. For example, we can usually predict that the unemployment periods of 50+ older workers will tend to be longer than that of "normal" workers. However, this does not demonstrate that older workers are slower or less flexible than younger ones. It is a matter of social organization and self-fulfilling prophecies: if, in a given society, the dominant agents in the labor market are under the impression that productivity is declining after the age of 50, this will likely become true, not because it is inherent in their functional senescing, but as an artifact of the chronometric regimes that define these persons as older workers.

Given the tendency to exclude older workers from the labor market (unless they are absolutely needed) and yet the importance of work for income, housing, health, social contacts, and the articulation of personal identities, these aspects of life may become increasingly at risk as people reach higher ages. Retirement may offer attractive prospects of many "golden years" to persons who can afford them, but it also enforces age-segregation and even excludes many aging people from possibilities of gaining a decent income (Macnicol 2006). Women who want to return to the labor market after having raised their children are particularly disadvantaged because they are labeled as older workers right from the start (Baars, Beck, and Graveland 1997; Ginn, Street, and Arber 2001). Such increasing risks are not caused by senescing processes but are to a large degree constituted by age-related processes in the labor market.

The acceleration of aging on the labor market has also increased the pressure on the lives of "normal adults," who are typically faced with the simultaneous burdens of raising children, paying the mortgage, making a career, and saving for a possibly long life before they too will enjoy the problematic status of older worker. When their long-term overburdening eventually leads to health problems, these are too often explained by referring to their age, offering another superficial argument to legitimate an early exit from the labor market.

The all-too-abstract categorical status of "aged" or "older worker" is assigned to people at an astonishingly low age when seen in the same chronometric perspective in which life expectancies are established. The paradoxical *acceleration* of societal senescence stands in strong contrast with the rising life expectancy over the last century (Oeppen and Vaupel 2002). The rising life expectancy should rather be interpreted as a *slowing down* of senescing processes. When citizens are considered to be "old" at the chronometric age of 50, this awkward status may remain with them for several decades. In the late modern life course, old age may be twice as long as "normal" adulthood, which may not last much longer than 20 or 25 years. It does not take more than a few moments to realize the absurdity of this situation.

Chronometric Regimes

The chronometric life course includes not only ages but also *durations* of processes or activities. As institutions and organizations in late modern societies tend to use chronometric time to control and coordinate actions and processes, the individuals who are living in time will be confronted with chronometric regimes that combine chronometric age and durations of participations in education, employment, social services, or care (cf. Leisering and Leibfried 1999). In many countries, income provisions such as unemployment benefits, disability benefits, or pensions, take age *and* duration of (un)employment into account to establish the amount and duration of benefits. Generally, the number of years that were (allowed to be) spent in education, in work, in paying for a mortgage or pension, will have important effects over the life course. Chronometric durations of education or employment may not only structure the way persons remember, evaluate, or plan their lives but can also have consequences in later life, for instance, access to and amount of pensions.

In countries where labor unions play an important role, such as most EU member states, there are often detailed employment contracts that aim at both increasing efficiency and providing better protection of employees. These contracts often imply a rather precise chronometric structuring of working life, both in short-term and long-term perspectives. Negotiations between employers and employees decide not only the length of a working day but also the *durations* of regular breaks, and the number of working days and holidays per year. Chronometric distinctions can also be formalized in rules concerning the protection of the employee's status, the length of trial periods in relation to permanent appointments or tenure, seniority rights, and anniversaries.

Moreover, chronometric salary scales associated with projected working careers often structure the future prospects of the employees (Kohli 1986; Kohli, Rosenow, and Wolf 1983).

A further effect of such employment contracts is a standardization of the duration of important events in private life. An exact number of days are allotted for celebrating one's marriage or mourning the loss of a close relative, just as the length of maternity leave determines the time that can be devoted to the experiences of having a child. Also, the exact number of days a person may be ill without any serious consequences for his or her job or income is laid down (cf. Mayer and Müller 1986). Such regulations may seem quaint for persons for whom they have little meaning because they have to invest more time in their work than these schedules suggest or because they are self-employed. However, this does not mean that their work is free from chronometric pressure. It may, paradoxically, be *more* under chronometric tensions than that of those who work according to fixed timetables.

The increased flexibility and accelerating mobility of late modern society are counterbalanced by intensified registrations of all kinds of durations (living in a specific place, beginning and completion of educational tracks, jobs, personal relationships, etc.) that are connected with the ages of the persons concerned. Companies and institutions register the birth dates of their clients and develop age-related policies based on the databanks with which they approach their customers, clients, or employees. In this chronometric variation on Foucault's (1988) panopticon, all movements of individuals through time that are considered relevant are registered, so that digitalized chronometric files, whether accurate or not, are created and can be used for many purposes. Digitalized databases make it seemingly easy to calculate the effects of proposed policies, given the age composition of specific populations or the budgetary consequences of a suspension of benefits at certain ages. Citizens have accustomed themselves to these practices and have adopted proto-bureaucratic approaches to their own lives: interviews, short descriptions of persons by others, or self-presentations such as resumes and CVs. In many applications for work, insurance or mortgage information must be given in accordance with these chronometric structures. As a result of these increasingly "normal" practices, discussions about human lives over time assume that chronometric calculi can give a firm grasp on and offer exact information about the risks or opportunities that persons of certain ages may bring to specific systems. These practices presuppose and fortify the assumption that

ultimately human lives can best (i.e., most objectively) be understood and organized from the perspective of chronometric time.

1.3. Care and Its Chronometric Regimes

As women continued, in late modern society, to escape the patriarchal definitions of their social destinies and went "out, in life's battle fighting," as Schiller put it, new arrangements had to be developed for activities that were seen as typically feminine tasks. However, in this process *care,* in the broad sense, has been transformed into several specific forms of care, some of which are organized into systems and professionalized, such as health care, long-term care, or home care. These different forms are taken out of "care" in the more comprehensive sense as a way of life that was formerly the daily reality *inside* the private domain. The systemic world partly denies the fundamental role of care and partly tries to organize and to professionalize it in systemic institutions. This process has ambivalent aspects: on the one hand, specific forms of care that are professionalized have a chance of improving in a technical sense, as we can see in the advances that have been made in the highly professionalized health care. On the other hand, as these specialized forms of care have been taken out of a more enveloping concept of care, they tend to lose the interpersonal qualities that distinguish them from the contractual maintenance and repair of material objects such as cars.

In the 1980s an important feminist discussion emerged that articulated a fundamental concept "ethics of care" in opposition to the dominant "ethics of justice" as represented, for instance, by the work of John Rawls (1971). This "ethics of care" (Folbre 2001; Gilligan 1982; V. Held 1993; Kittay 1999; Noddings 2003; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993; Williams 2000) articulates the values that are implied in the care that humans have for each other as a practical presupposition of life, from birth to death. As such, it represents a moral approach that has profound implications for many issues such as justice, the law, markets, work, family, and cultural differences (Held 2007; Slote 2007). Its concepts of care are much broader than have materialized in the contemporary professionalized versions of care. At stake is an approach to life or an *ethos:* a fundamental way of living that also has important implications for care in the more specific or professionalized settings, although its perspectives go far beyond this. In the historical perspective of section 1.1, the ethics of care can be seen as a resurfacing of the interpersonal values that were left be-

hind in the private sphere of the nuclear family as the modern life course was built around male wage labor.

During the early stages of societal modernization sketched above, there was already an important debate about the moral issues that are at stake in the later discussions between the ethics of care and the ethics of justice: the debate between the proponents of the theory of moral sentiments founded by Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In his 1711 *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* Shaftesbury (2005) answered the question of why we care for each other by elaborating on moral sentiments such as benevolence and sympathy that were taken for granted as belonging to living together. Kant's approach to ethics, on the other hand, was more in line with modern individualist and contractual orientations: he asked what rational arguments we have to support the claim that we *should* care for each other (Kant 2004). The consequence of Kant's focus on rational arguments as the only way to convince rational human beings is that he neglects the interpersonal bonds that precede and contextualize rationality. His approach amounts to asking what arguments would convince a rational human being who is not concerned with others and has nothing in common with them except for a universal "practical reason" to act morally? In other words, Kant's argumentative approach began by taking humans out of their life worlds and subsequently trying to convince them that they have no other choice than to see themselves as rational humans and to act accordingly. This last approach was more in tune with the emphasis on contractual justice in modern society and became more influential than Shaftesbury's view. In late modern neoliberal orientations, the tensions that were inherent in the Kantian approach become more visible. It remains difficult to convince persons who are portrayed as essentially self-centered and egoistic to act "socially" for their own interest.

The ethics of care is also a reflection about ways of approaching life that have been lost or been left to subjective preference without much awareness that the quality of life, also in its late modern forms, depends on the ways in which we care for others even if it does not bring some profit or is not a contractual obligation. In the late modern organization of the life course, care and moral sentiments tend to get a residual place; the values that are explicated in the ethics of care have tended to become a personal matter during the modernization process: something one can do or not. What counts in society is the functioning of the market, laws, and regulations.

There is no need to get stuck in a dichotomy of systemic worlds versus

life worlds or of an ethics of justice versus an ethics of care; in fact, this last opposition has already been left behind since Joan Tronto's *Moral Boundaries* (1993). Many shortcomings of premodern communities or contemporary life worlds can be addressed in better systemic arrangements or contractual protections of clients, but this should not lead to the idealization of systemic or contractual solutions. The problem is one of domination or overemphasis, where the balance and reciprocity are lost between the merits of systemic approaches on the one hand, and the interpersonal qualities that can only be acquired by taking part in human life worlds on the other. Insofar as these two worlds inevitably conflict, it appears to be important to keep these conflicts open without resorting to a dichotomy of two social domains that are indifferent to each other.

Because there is still a strong cultural macro-narrative that care would be primarily a female responsibility, we might conclude that the late modern life course is a systemically organized modernization of the premodern patriarchal life course found in most Western societies in spite of the many differences between their main traditions. The organization of the late modern life course still neglects the importance of caregiving, just as the traditional patriarch assumed that he would be taken care of without taking part in such activities. Although patriarchal traditions have been mitigated in late modernity and women are also supposed to pursue their interests outside the private domain and have careers, the cultural association between household and care tasks and women has not vanished. Moreover, such care tasks are still seen as relatively unimportant—something that is taking place outside the societal domains that really count. What typically happens is that women suddenly and unexpectedly become involved in intensive forms of care because there is no other humane alternative (Brody 1990). The criticism has been voiced that there is still a kind of silent contract between the sexes regarding care that is functionally related to the economy and that personal sentiments of women are misused to continue a situation in which the daily caregiving activities of women (including older women) are not really acknowledged (Abel 1991). Margaret Urban Walker has pointed to the consequences for women's life courses, which do not resemble the typical linear careers of males because many women do "the sort of work that never 'goes anywhere,' in terms of social status, occupational importance, or increasing economic power" (Walker 1999, 105; see 5.2.). The result is that they often occupy less favorable economic positions when they are older. This is one of the reasons for the "feminization

of poverty" that has been observed among the aging part of the population (Ginn, Street, and Arber 2001; Estes 2006; Mittelman and Tambe 2000; Walker and Maltby 1997). Meanwhile, the fact that many female life courses do not resemble linear careers does not mean that they experience less chronometric pressure during their lives.

Taking care of others is not highly respected in current society: giving everyday care, doing household chores, raising children, and taking care of ill relatives bring little status and are often seen as lost work time. Although care activities are of crucial importance for everybody and not just for those in need of care, within a systemic culture of instrumentality, such activities can only obtain a marginal position, even when they have been professionalized and organized in institutions. The wages and esteem of those who work in home or institutional care demonstrate this, contrasting sharply with that bestowed on persons with scientific backgrounds who are working in the same sector but focusing, for instance, on cure through medical technology or on managerial issues. The more a person is removed from direct bodily care, the more he or she appears to be valued, with the managers of large care institutions at the top of the pyramid. The base of the typical institutional care pyramid consists nearly exclusively of female caregivers who increasingly come from poorer countries. At the top are mostly persons who have been trained in instrumental approaches and managerial models that are supposed to work well everywhere and who, consequently, often have difficulty seeing and understanding the specific nature of caregiving.

The late modern organization of the life course prefers "pit stop service" (Baars 2006a): a quick fix for those who have to continue their accelerating lives, but it does not favor care, especially not long-term care. In aging populations many women will bear the burden of this neo-patriarchal orientation as they both live longer and are the main caregivers, informal as well as professional. Because these problems occur even in the richest societies, we can conclude that it is not a matter of lacking finances but of what is seen as important in life. Or rather, it is a matter of how to bridge the distance between what many people do feel is most important in life and the systemic ways in which late modern society has been organized.

Chronometric Care and Its Acceleration

Although caregiving brings little respect, the control over its professional forms and the many, often very expensive, attempts to make care cheaper and more

efficient are highly valued. In such strategies chronometric time plays an important role because it is typically used to measure events or processes to see whether they can be organized more efficiently—especially, faster and less time-consuming. Such a restructuring of processes and situations from the chronometric perspective may have several important consequences for persons who are dependent on long-term care or home care. Think of the phenomenon of *time budgets* in institutions for care. There is a crucial transition from measuring the durations of particular conversations or acts of care and establishing that these activities take an average of 5 or 9 minutes, to regulations that specify that a conversation or a specific act of care *may not exceed* a precise amount of time. As a tool for instrumental approaches, chronometric time has gained a dominant position at the expense of lived time (see further discussion at 4.3). Its tightly calculated regimes clash with time perspectives that are inherent in situations of personal contact, since needs tend to fluctuate with these situations. The dominant position of chronometric time in institutional care has been documented in some research (Diamond 1992; Gubrium 1975). Henderson (1995) has called it a "cult of time and task" in which care becomes organized in routines that are structured by clock time and that lack flexibility and individual consideration. Twigg (2000) sees in this chronometric hegemony a new rhythm of care. Insofar as the lives of the clients are not dominated by these schedules, they seem to have plenty of time. But if their experience of living in time knows only chronometric time, they will be confronted with its emptiness although they can try to pass, fill, or "kill" the time (Calkins 1970).

In many situations, professionals as well as clients may suffer from the contrast they experience between their personal concerns and the bureaucratic and impersonal ways in which systemically organized institutions work. This critical observation does not imply that professional standards, contractual agreements, and their systemic control and coordination are always superfluous, but they cannot guarantee the best possible care. Given the necessity of organizing some forms of care professionally, it appears important to refrain from retreating to a dichotomy between systemic dynamics and life world concerns, instead keeping the tensions between them open and alive as much as possible in critical discussion and negotiation.

The pressure to take processes apart, measuring their duration and restructuring them to improve temporal efficiency—because "time is money" and the clock ticks away the dollars—has been developed predominantly in rationaliz-

ing the production of material objects. The problem is that this chronometric approach is more and more applied to activities that will not lead to better results if they are accelerated. Inadequate comparisons will always lead to a poor efficiency of care institutions because care tasks do not qualify for productivity growth in the same way that material production does. Behind many contemporary complaints about the prohibitive costs of care is the broad assumption that the "productivity" of activities can always be increased because these activities or parts of them can always be accelerated. However, the production of objects such as teacups or glasses may, for instance, be increased from 50 to 10,000 units per hour by means of better technology, but it is hardly possible for a group of well-trained caregivers to wash and dress 10,000 persons instead of the usual 50 persons in the same period of time. Essential for caregiving is at least some degree of interpersonal attention that cannot be minimized without serious consequences. Perhaps some efficiency can be gained by reducing and standardizing the available time so that as little time as possible is spent on washing and dressing a person, but such streamlining will threaten the quality of care. As long as care involves a relationship between persons, its "productivity" cannot be increased to a degree that is comparable with many forms of material production. In economic terms, this means that in spite of the fact that wages in professional care are already behind those in other sectors, productivity of care cannot keep up with more general wage developments. This problem is typical of thriving economies and is known in economics as "Baumol disease" (Baumol 2001). It shows that approaches that may be adequate in some sectors, such as increasing efficiency or acceleration of productivity, do not always make sense in life world activities such as caregiving. If instrumental approaches are not reflected on responsibly and changed accordingly, they are a threat to good care rather than an improvement.

Time-efficient Lives

The tendency to approach and reorganize care from the perspective of chronometric time is just one example of a more general tendency to improve activities, processes, or situations by making them more "time efficient." This narrow understanding of time has become a crucial interface between the systemic world and the life worlds. In its continuous restructuring of activities and processes in terms of measured *durations,* the late modern culture of acceleration forces individuals to develop a calculating, planning, and pressurizing attitude toward their lives. Whoever fails to join in this general acceleration

will be left behind and be considered too slow or too old. Chronometric time may seem to be neutral, but it tends to distort the temporal dimensions of human life as it narrows them to one measurable dimension. It may seem as if we would lose as little time as possible when we keep our eyes on the clock, but actually we will lose all time except for chronometric time.

In spite of their unpleasant effects, the pressures of time limits are broadly accepted and even seem to have a certain appeal because they are associated with popular macro-narratives that connect acceleration with progress (as if this cannot have a destructive side), youthfulness (as if this commercial image would be the only way to live well), dynamic life (as if serenity, contemplation, and time for each other have lost their meaning) and the "newest new." The flip side is waste, in which meaningful cultural heritages will be debunked as old-fashioned things of the past and replaced together with yesterday's newest gadget. It may take some aging, at least some deepening of life experience, to see that much of what is presented as new amounts to "more of the same" and to make meaningful distinctions accordingly.

The acceleration of change is not only seen in the domains of production and consumption or in professional situations; it also affects broader contexts of daily life. Somebody who returns after many years in the city where he grew up will often feel like a stranger because so much that served as points of orientation and identification has gone. But even people who have remained in the same place may feel estranged because everything around them has been changing constantly; even if they have been living in the same house, they may have gotten another address. This social constitution of disorientation is typical for late modern culture, which is characterized by an intensification of a restless *modernization* in which "all that is solid melts into air" (cf. Giddens 1990, 1991; Baars 2006a). Pressures that are related to processes of globalization are usually also pressures to speed up change as part of the struggle to survive the global competition (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000; Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006).

The late modern acceleration of change tends to *undermine* the external support of identities that used to exist in the form of clear and continuous professional codes or continuous customs and morals. Not surprisingly, there is an extensive contemporary debate about the construction of "identity" and "self" (e.g., Holstein and Gubrium 2000; see 5.2.). There is even more reason to reflect on the identities of aging persons, because these tend to be undermined by the overemphasis on change and acceleration. The weakening sup-

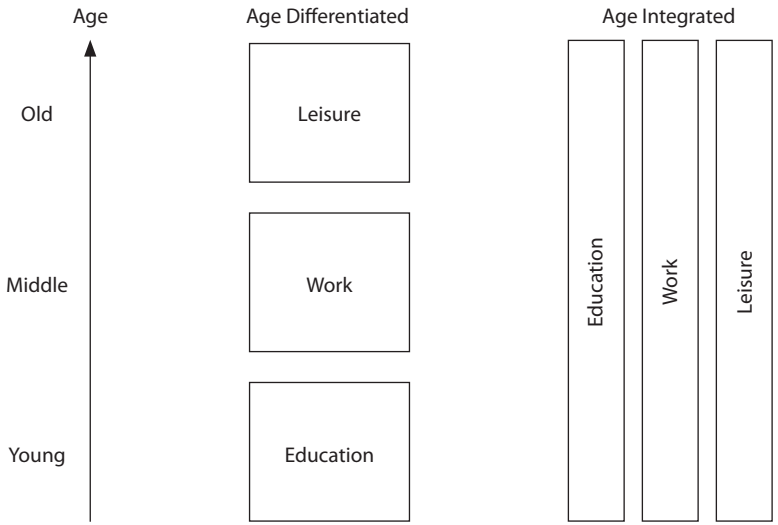

Fig 1.1 Age Differentiation and Age Integration (adapted from Riley 1998, p. 8).

port for aging identities from identical contexts results in a much more direct and individual confrontation with the abstract nature of chronometric time.

That structural arrangements still continue in age-related regulations that conflict with the need to integrate aging in society was noted as a major social problem by Riley, Kahn, and Foner (1994). In the context of the Program on Aging and Structural Change, an extensive study was made of the problems called "structural lag" (in analogy with cultural lag): as life expectancies rise, they conflict with age-related structures that may have made sense in bygone days but now lag behind present opportunities. Instead of diagnosing a de-standardization or a de-institutionalization of the life course, Riley and her associates emphasized that the "three boxes of life"—first, upbringing and education, then work, and finally the leisure of retirement—were still in place, obstructing further integration of aging with its increasing possibilities in society (fig. 1.1).

The global categorization of the life course into the three boxes of life arose on the basis of two assumptions. The first was that it would be possible to give individuals a short and intensive education that would last their complete working lives; the second was that the end of this working life should be clearly defined by uniform ages. The first assumption is clearly no longer adequate, since it has lost contact with the accelerating changes of late mod-

ern society, and the second one has been under pressure for some decades. Instead of a fixed sequence, these basic domains of life should remain open to access during the whole adult life course. For Riley and her associates, age integration meant opening the opportunities for adults of all ages to learn, be active, and rest without being trapped in age-specific cages—something that is far from reality in contemporary Western societies. In this sense, age segregation still exists; age has not become irrelevant. However, lacking in their alternative is care in the broad sense that has been discussed above. It has also been neglected in prevailing conceptions of citizenship and even in critical postmodern approaches to the life course, just as it has been ignored in the organization of the life course throughout modernity. A better integration of care in society would acknowledge that everybody needs care but that the intensity of this need fluctuates with different situations over the life course (fig. 1.2). The need for care will depend, among other things, on senescing processes, yet it cannot be linked directly to age.

As the systemic world tries to regulate the supply and demand of labor and care using chronometric calculi, the population tends to be seen in terms of numbers of people with certain ages, together with expected durations of pensions and needs for professional care. In calculating life expectancies, dependency ratios, and the costs or benefits of different arrangements or proposals, one easily loses sight of the life course as something more than a bureaucratic calculus, and there is a risk that calculations occlude the different life worlds that the systemic world should serve. In such a chronometric culture, it comes as no surprise to encounter proposals to limit access to health care for people in their seventies, because at such ages humans would have led a "full life" and all that "unnecessary care" would get far too expensive in comparison with what may be needed for people with lower ages (Callahan 1987). In such cases it remains crucial to see that these "objective, hard facts and calculations" only derive their debatable meaning from not-so-objective narratives about the value of human lives, suggesting this could be expressed in dollars, euros, yuan, or yen. Similar fundamental questions arise in the debates about the acceptable costs of QUALYs or *Quality Adjusted Life Years* (years gained by medical interventions) in which existential issues are not faced but are calculated away (Hirth et al. 2000).

In the following section it will become clear that the age of adults is not such a clear and solid ground to build on. As chronometric time plays an increasingly important role in calculations concerning social policies, the main

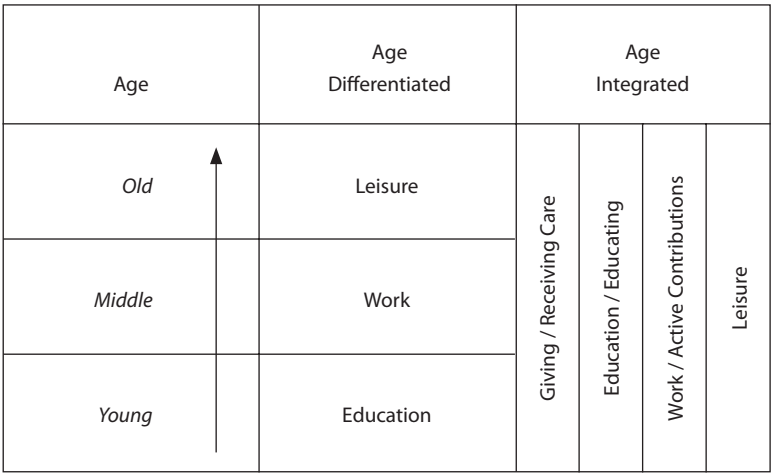

Fig 1.2 Integrating Care in a Life Course beyond the Three Boxes of Life

perspective on aging revolves around chronometric age. This contributes little to a better understanding of aging processes, although it is widely used in the legitimation of these policies. The instrumental perspective on time has even less to offer to aging persons as they are left with an impoverished approach to aging as living in time.

1.4. Chronometric Aging: Exactly Arbitrary

All human beings are constantly aging, but at a certain rather arbitrary moment in life they will be labeled "aged" or "older" (than whom?). Generally, it is assumed that age plays an increasingly important role in accounting for activities and situations of people as soon as they have crossed that threshold. Adult persons are transformed into aged or older bodies at a particular chronometric age without any evidence that such changes are actually taking place at that age. This relocation into the category of aged or older, which may already take place at the age of 50, depends on contexts and changes with these contexts. These practices are not grounded in an integrated process of senescing which runs with an even pace like a biological clock inside human beings.

The organization of aging processes has many complicated aspects, one of which is the way this organization is informed by statistical overviews based on chronometric age. The majority of applied aging studies, which are the

most important studies in terms of policy implications, begin by defining their population in terms of chronometric age. Their results can usually be summarized in diagrams where age is on one axis and certain social, economic, and health characteristics that are shown to change with increasing age are on the other. Such visualizations suggest that senescing processes can be clearly and unequivocally related to chronometric age, although the presented data are mostly unexplained connections. This may lead to an accumulation of data, but in itself not to *explanatory* knowledge.

Human aging cannot simply be conceptualized as reaching a higher chronometric age. This does not mean that chronometric time is not an important tool for many purposes or that the use of chronometric age should be banned. For the purpose of understanding human aging, however, the relevance of chronometric age is quite limited, and its use often serves to *evade* the question what aging actually is. That aging is poorly indicated by higher chronometric age may sometimes be admitted, but this does not appear to lead to much change in research practices.

Chronometric time serves many purposes well, but it becomes a source of problems when it gets more credit than it deserves. This *under*reflected *over*emphasis on chronometric time leads to the unwarranted assumption that an integrated process of senescing runs in synchrony with a clock that counts the years. The grand ambition of many aging studies still seems to be to establish how the chronometric age of persons determines the characteristics of aging persons. This would eventually result in a straightforward set of simple formulas in which scientific precision and practical use would be united. More than fifty years ago this option was already stated with much self-assurance: "Chronological age is one of the most useful single items of information about an individual if not the *most* useful. From this knowledge alone, an amazingly large number of general statements or predictions can be made about his anatomy, physiology, psychology, and social behavior" (Birren 1959, 8). Although the author of these lines later expressed serious reservations about these claims, many institutions and organizations that finance research on aging and ask for straightforward data about "seniors" are still under their spell. The scientific precision that is associated with chronometric time has led to an uncritical acceptance of arbitrary constructions of chronometric age. We have reasons to doubt whether chronometric age is really the "independent" or even "explanatory" variable much research assumes it to be, which

leads to the question of whether the age-related definitions of these populations make sense.

The assumption that chronometric age determines relevant characteristics of aging persons presupposes and reinforces the *chronometric life course* in which chronometric time has also become the dominant instrumental perspective. Concepts used in the discussions of "aging societies," such as age-structure, birth cohorts, age groups, age norms, age grading, dependency-ratio, age-cost profile, and age-associated diseases, have become so general that their specific meanings are rarely questioned.

The problem with the idea of chronometric aging is the suggestion that the exactness of measuring chronometric time would also give exact results in terms of age-related characteristics. Although processes of senescing and aging can be *measured* chronometrically, they are not *regulated* by chronometric time. The step from chronometric *time* to chronometric *age* should be taken very cautiously if we want to take aging seriously, especially because chronometric age is widely used in contemporary societies to regulate all kinds of processes and to distinguish categories of people, with many consequences for the persons concerned—consequences, we can add, that are often erroneously interpreted as "*effects* of aging."

To counteract these tendencies, it should be emphasized that the search for typical characteristics that could clearly be related to chronometric ages has produced impressive amounts of data that demonstrate, in fact, the many *differences* in aging. Such counterevidence hardly comes as a surprise when we try to imagine persons with the same chronometric age but living in very different circumstances. Think, for instance, of 60-year-olds. One would expect enormous differences in terms of empirical data and personal experiences between, let us say, a poor African woman, a Japanese man, or a homeless American of that age—not to mention 60-year-olds in prehistoric times, in the Roman Empire, in classical China, or among nineteenth-century factory workers. One has only to look around to notice major differences between people with the same age.

The fact that in Western countries the average life expectancy for males has practically doubled in the last 150 years (Oeppen and Vaupel 2002) also implies that chronometric age cannot by itself explain aging processes. This does not imply that chronometric projections of life expectancy or mortality rates would give adequate explanations of aging processes. Although they

raise important questions about the possible meanings of age and aging, they also tend to play an under-reflected role in the institutionalized overemphasis on chronometric age. These major generalizations across whole populations of countries often extrapolate trends that reach half a century or more into the future, although different backgrounds—for instance, in education, labor markets, pension systems, housing, care arrangements, genetic codes, medical histories, or available medical technology—are likely to result in different life expectancies. Even a "cohort identity" established by contrast with other cohorts within the same historical context remains to a high degree an abstract construction that has to tolerate a considerable amount of internal differentiation (Dannefer 1984, 2003a). Major longitudinal studies like the Berlin Aging Study (Baltes and Mayer 1999) or the Seattle Longitudinal Study (Schaie 2005) offer many examples of such unexplained differences (cf. also Daatland and Biggs 2006).

Because human beings with the same chronometric age can show—even from a mere biological point of view—very different characteristics that may be relevant from the perspective of senescing, we can no longer assume that such processes develop in synchrony with chronometric time. The many faces of aging between the extremes of a teenager suffering from progeria (premature aging syndrome) and a vibrantly alive centenarian are mirrors in which prejudiced citizens, scientists, or bureaucrats who count the ages should be able to see their own distorted views.

Intrinsic Time and Intrinsic Malleability

There have been some attempts to emancipate the study of aging from chronometric time and to develop a more "intrinsic" time perspective for senescing processes. An intrinsic measure of senescing would require—at least in a biological or, more generally, a functional perspective—establishing clear indicators of "normal" functioning for different ages. Such differently marked ages would ideally have to be expressed in a continuum as subsequent *phases* that would demonstrate a structured development away from a state of adult health or "normality." It is doubtful whether all biological processes of human senescing can be adequately seen as *continuous* functional deterioration: some may improve because of interventions; some may slow down for a considerable time or suddenly collapse. If we define senescing in terms of biological reliability theory (Gavrilov and Gavrilova 2006) as a phenomenon of increasing risk of failure with the passage of time, we must still ask in what way a statisti-

cal notion of increasing risk—which is likely to vary depending on contexts—can lead to an understanding of senescing. Even if we would have reliable biomarkers of age, such as the aspartate racemization in the teeth, which is used in forensics (Yekkala et al. 2006), this would not allow us to explain why a person with a biological age of 62 dies within a year, while another person with a biological age of 82 will live for another twenty years.

From a functional perspective, the complicated processes of human senescing in cells, tissues, organs, or different parts of the brain may have their specific dynamic properties, but these usually include—to make it even more complicated—an openness to the environments inside and outside the human body, extending from personal lifestyles to ecological or social contexts. Emerging research from ecological developmental biology (Gilbert and Epel 2009) on the social organization of genetic expression (*epigenesis*) demonstrates how complex these interactive processes are (Dannefer 2011; Douthit, Dannefer, and Kelley-Moore, forthcoming). These processes must be discovered in their *specificity,* and in the course of this discovery chronometric time can only function as an instrument and should not be extended to represent human aging. Tensions between intrinsic qualities, specific contexts, and the wish to arrive at general conclusions about senescing also mount in the experiments with fruit flies, nematodes, mice, rats, birds, and monkeys as their senescing processes are manipulated in laboratory contexts to investigate whether these processes—usually, but insofar as they are biological, inadequately, referred to as "aging" (cf. Masoro and Austed, eds., 2006)—can be generalized for use in understanding human senescing. Insofar as these experiments result in different life spans for these animals, they illustrate the *intrinsic malleability* of senescing processes (Kirkwood 2005; Westendorp and Kirkwood 2007).

The Heisenberg Principle of Aging

Generalizations about people of a certain calendar age actually presuppose a *causal* concept of time: because time has worked for a certain duration in aged people, certain inevitable effects should be reckoned with. Moreover, the effects are assumed to develop steadily and universally according to the rhythm of the clock. However, such a causal concept of time in aging can never generate knowledge that might explain the differences that exist between human beings of the same age or allow us to understand further that we are dealing with generalizing concepts that cover up many specific processes. While it is true that all causal relations are also temporal relations, or relations working

"in time," it would be wrong to identify causality with time or to reduce the process of aging to illusory "causal effects" of time. The same Jim Birren whose high expectations of the predictive power of chronometric age I quoted earlier, later articulated a similar view: "By itself, the collection of large amounts of data showing relationships with chronological age does not help, because chronological age is not the cause of anything. Chronological age is only an index, and unrelated sets of data show correlations with chronological age that have no intrinsic or causal relationship with each other" (Birren 1999, 460).

Because aging involves many different processes at different levels, including a multitude of interacting biological processes, these processes must be understood in their specific temporal qualities: they evolve or take place in time, but not according to the rhythm of chronometric time. Although senescing *processes* (which, like all processes, can be measured in chronometric time) will have effects in interaction with contextual structures and processes, time by itself does not have any effects. To assume that it does leads away from an understanding of aging, although it may produce neat distributions of average characteristics of persons according to their ages.

More clarity about different temporal dimensions and implicit concepts of time should be a major priority for aging studies because only if we can specify more precisely the temporal qualities of different processes of aging and senescing will it be possible to arrive at better explanations of the variations in aging among humans of the same chronometric age, which are often hidden in average scores.

It is not possible to study processes of aging as we would study many other processes, because we cannot observe aging in an experimental group and compare the results with a control group that would not age. We are living in time, and although (unlike stones or trees) we can be aware of this, we cannot step out of time or aging to observe it purely. Getting a clear understanding of time is hard because it is always difficult to distance ourselves from what we take for granted. Time slips away *because we are living in it.* The notorious Age-Period-Cohort problem (cf. Baars 2007b; Schaie 2007) confronts us with questions about what we have actually established when we have found, for instance, that a high percentage of a group of 70-year-olds suffer from obesity. Is this because of their age? Is it part of their specific cohort identity? Is it because they grew up and older in a specific period in a specific society? Is it a little bit of all that? The epistemological riddle of this Age-Period-Cohort problem is another example of the *enveloping* and *elusive nature* of time: we

are living in time and cannot step out of it to pinpoint it clearly. This fundamental human condition leads to problems even in the most sophisticated research strategies and could be called the *Heisenberg principle of uncertainty in aging:* just as it appears to be impossible in quantum theory to determine simultaneously both the position and the momentum of an electron with equal accuracy or certainty, we cannot determine aging, period, or cohort independently from each other. Human aging cannot be studied in a universal form; even a scientifically controlled life in a laboratory would be a life in a specific context that co-constitutes the processes that take place. We can only hope to determine specific forms of aging in retrospect, without any guarantee that these processes will be the same in the future even in other contemporary contexts. We can never find aging in a *pure* form; aging can only be experienced or studied in specific persons and specific situations or societal contexts that influence and co-constitute the processes involved.

Chronometric age is just a measurement of the time that has elapsed since someone was born. We are getting older with every tick of the clock, but this "older" has a precise meaning only in a chronometric not a gerontological sense. The "aged" are extremely heterogeneous and have no more in common than a certain minimal calendar age. Dividing adults into age categories may seem practical, but it does not advance our understanding of aging. Chronometric approaches are nevertheless quite dominant, since age-related generalizations offer a superficial clarity that can easily be used to justify prejudice or systemic policies. Studying or even discussing aging invites metaphors and narratives about living in time, and these often make a major contribution behind the scenes without being openly discussed (see 5.2). If age-related generalizations are presented without further questioning their suggested meanings, there is a danger that conventional prejudices about the aged will be reproduced or new ones introduced even if the objective is to help and support them.

The pseudo-exactness of chronometric age not only tends to hide prejudice in systemic policies, but its scientific aura also tends to ignore the narratives that reflect personal experiences of aging. Insofar as aging studies limit their approaches to chronometric age because of its readiness to be used in generalizations and planning procedures involving large numbers of people, they fail to question political macro-narratives and to acknowledge the micro-narratives that represent aging experiences in human life worlds. If chronometric age has any meaning, even prejudicial, it comes from these narrative sources, not from time measurements. The one-sided emphasis on chrono-

metric time tends to neglect not only personal meaning but *all* meaningful dimensions of aging.

To avoid any misunderstanding: these arguments are no denial of the finitude of human life (see chapter 6), nor do they deny that "aging" can be observed in any human being if we compare certain characteristics of the same person over a relatively long period of time. The question is how to approach these themes to better understand them. To achieve this it is essential to understand the specific significance and relativity of chronometric time and its unfounded seductions.

Confronted with the enormous quantity of empirical data gathered in the last decade that demonstrate the differences among "the aged," Settersten (2003, 2004) has given an overview of what gerontologists say makes "old people" different from other adults: losses in physical and cognitive capacities; increased likelihood of failing health and a centrality of health concerns in self-definitions; a shorter time horizon and a more pressing need to come to terms with one's mortality; personal loss, bereavement, and more restricted social networks; being perceived and treated by others in ageist ways; a greater acceptance of things that cannot be controlled *in* life, coupled with a greater fear of losing control *over* one's life.

These important issues that humans can be confronted with as they age demonstrate how limited the concept of chronometric age is. It is always possible to establish averages or modal generalizations, but losses in physical and cognitive capacities, failing health, and bereavement are not evenly distributed according to chronometric age (Dannefer, Kelly-Moore, and Lin 2009). There are different forms of "increased likelihood" for such losses—for instance, according to the socioeconomic contexts of the persons concerned—but they are in an essentially *uncertain* way part of finite human lives. Moreover, themes such as "a shorter time horizon" and "the need to come to terms with one's mortality" presuppose a more personal and existential involvement in temporal living than can be understood from chronometric time.

If we want to develop more insight into human aging, we need a broader and deeper understanding of different temporal perspectives so that we can understand more about aging as living in time. From a measurement perspective, it might seem that the longest life would be the best life, but this is no more true than is the claim that the largest painting is the best or that the highest building the most beautiful. Projections about life expectancy tend to be used implicitly as estimates of the quality of human lives. Although a

longer life is not unimportant, because we need, at least, to be alive for everything we want to do or experience, measuring chronometric ages cannot replace thinking about the classical question of what a *good* life might be, which includes the contemporary question of how we can *age well*. For this we need other concepts of time and temporal living such as the ones I turn to in later chapters of this book.

Conclusions

The institutionalized chronometric life course addresses the temporality of life not only at the structural but also at the individual level. However, because this institutionalization has turned bureaucratically around the domain of production, wage labor, and the labor market, the temporality of life has been narrowed to its instrumental chronometric version. Paradoxically, the life course of the individual, in all his alleged uniqueness, is now measured and judged from the most impersonal point of view: the number of years lived. More qualitative dimensions of living in time have been pushed back into the private sphere of life worlds that play a secondary role in a systemically organized society. The overemphasis on achievement or mere economic survival has even resulted in a depreciation of interpersonal dimensions that could be characterized as care in the broad sense of the ethics of care.

On the one hand, late modern society improves general circumstances, resulting in rising life expectancies—at least for the majority of those who live in the Western countries. But on the other hand, their lives as older persons begin, not at the official retirement ages, but fifteen years or more earlier than was customary several decades ago. Probably young adults have always considered the generation of their parents as "old" (with positive or negative connotations), but now such immature prejudices are reproduced and widely accepted. The broad culture of accelerating aging will especially hit those who become unemployed. Adults will be excluded earlier from employment because of their age, although this does not make sense within the same logic of age generalizations because their life expectancies have been rising. This leads to what I have called the *first paradox of the younger older:* living longer but being called "old" at an earlier age (Baars 2006b). This paradox is also striking in quantitative terms: the phase of life in which one is considered to be older or aged may be twice as long as the phase during which one is seen as a normal adult.

One of the macro-narratives behind chronometric practices is a technologically inspired idealization of acceleration that speeds up the obsolescence of technological generations and creates a general climate of intolerance toward slowness or "taking your time." In response to these developments, there has sometimes been an idealization of slowness, but the problem is that some forms of acceleration, such as giving help in case of emergencies, are meaningful. It is a matter of acknowledging different forms of temporality and finding the adequate temporal mode: different situations, activities, or forms of receptivity require appropriate temporal forms or attitudes. The temporality of reading poetry is different from that of reading a newspaper or thriller; walking to enjoy the landscape has a different temporal mode from walking to get somewhere as quickly as possible. Measuring the *time* of such activities does not give a clue about the different, more subtle temporal *experiences* that are involved.

A general cultural acceleration, however, speeds up not only the senescence of smart phones, cars, or computers but also the cultural senescing of aging persons. Whereas throughout history young children were instructed by their parents or other older persons in the proper use of tools, in late modern society such instructions are usually given by the younger to the older. Many (grand)parents have experienced that their (grand)children are much more advanced in the use of computers and that they have to turn to them for advice There is a general cultural premium on what is new or young, regardless of its qualities, although it will be old tomorrow.

The culture of a rapid succession of technological generations has profound implications for intergenerational relationships: in a society that is tuned to competitive technological innovation, aging persons encounter new threats to their status during their unprecedented longer lives that have partly become possible though the same technological advances. The fundamental problem is that technological equipment remains an *instrument* which needs to be put to meaningful use. The overemphasis on technological standards leads away from the *contents* of the communication toward technological qualities such as presentation or acceleration. Approaching aging from the instrumental perspective of chronometric time also implies that meaningful aspects of aging are disappearing behind an attention for exact ages, as if such information would give control over life. It may be a good thing that the domination of the patriarch terminates in his digital clumsiness, but the technological cult of acceleration demands a high price: loss of the idea that older persons might

have learned something during their lives that might also be important for younger persons. This used to be called life experience, or wisdom.

Of course, the tensions or contradictions that are inherent in these late modern paradoxes of aging will also become manifest because many aging persons will not accept this depreciation and early exclusion. They can point to historical evidence, for instance, in comparing the situation of aging persons in the nineteenth or early twentieth century with their own lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They can argue that there are more solutions for practical problems or diseases than ever before, which should lead to a less negative or, indeed, a positive image of aging. Just as the feminist movement of the last decades has led to a fundamental reappraisal of gender and has rehabilitated much that was depreciated as mere feminine preoccupations, many aging persons are rethinking and rearranging the ways in which aging and the aged are approached.

Because the transition to the status of being aged has been dominated by the idea and wish to retire and to withdraw from societal activities, retirement has originated as a negative idea of "freedom from," of being a "care-less" subject in the care of others. Understandably, as being aged was for a long time a marginal (and for most people utopian) state that they would never set foot in, little attention has been given to developing a more positive participatory perspective on aging. According to the most inspiring elements of the wisdom traditions, such a more positive perspective should not only represent the interests of the aged as a category but also represent the search for a better life for all generations. In this endeavor there is also a need for a broader and deeper understanding of what it is to live *in time,* and from that understanding, to begin to develop *an art of aging*.

Before we can go forward with that task, we need to pay attention to developments that partly originate in the same problems of early exclusion and depreciation but give a different answer that could be summarized as *aging well by staying young*—with all its inherent tensions and, possibly, contradictions. The first paradox of the "younger older"—living longer but being regarded as old at an earlier age—has been an excellent breeding ground for the commercial development of new ways of aging that are actually ways to present yourself as "still young." This leads to the *second paradox of the younger older:* growing older while staying young. This is the subject of the next chapter.

2

Exclusion, Activism, and Eternal Youth

> And may you stay forever young. BOB DYLAN, 1965

Introduction

The first chapter ended with some major paradoxes that are brought about by the instrumental chronometric approaches to aging in a culture of general acceleration. The *first paradox of the younger older* refers to a premature cultural senescing of persons who, on average, live longer lives than ever before. The negative images that portray older people as a passive group depending on care and pensions at the expense of others don't encourage a positive identification with aging. In these circumstances aging persons are seduced into becoming active consumers on a market that tries to convince them that they are ageless—or better still, dynamic and young. There is an intriguing reciprocity between the efforts to divert older people from the labor market as soon as possible and the rise of a broad anti-aging culture. The complaints about the decreasing productivity of the "older employee" make way for suggestions that older people are still capable of enjoying everything from deep sea diving to mountaineering. Aging is promoted with ready-made adventures and products that keep a person young and going.

This leads to a *second paradox of the younger older:* growing older while stay-

ing young. The commercial image of a carefree youth, free from responsibilities or anything more serious than the next thrill seems to become a model for aging people. In the absence of a broadly shared, inspiring, and dignified culture of aging, practices of aging have become a prey of an anti-aging industry, in a broad sense, selling an illusion of staying young until exhaustion (Kastenbaum 1994). These phenomena demonstrate that although life has been enriched with many more years and a new phase in the life course, something essential still seems to be missing. This does not mean that there are no aging persons who are able to see through these restrictions and lead their own lives, but that is far from a meaningful integration of aging in society.

I begin by providing a historical background for these intriguing contemporary developments, returning in 2.1 to a major debate that surrounded the growth of gerontology in the mid-twentieth century. Initially, the image of aging was dominated by the idea that pensioners should disengage from society, since they would be exhausted through a long-term overburdening and could not be expected to live much longer. Soon, however, another emphasis emerged: aging persons should remain active, an acknowledgment that many pensioners were not as exhausted as those who argued for disengagement had expected. This discussion should have been accompanied by a rethinking and a rearranging of the roles that aging persons could play in society. Instead, especially in Europe but to a lesser extent also in the United States, the central domains of society have tended to exclude aging persons, more or less forcing them into disengagement, and their activities have become a way to remain busy in consumerist roles. Unfortunately, this trend has led to a predominantly anti-aging culture (2.2.), which has a much broader meaning than that of anti-aging medicine. Partly, it emerged from gerontological circles, since many gerontologists wished to show that the customary beliefs concerning the rapid decay of aging people left too little room for the possibilities they might still have. Subsequently, these developments were boosted by the huge commercial interests involved, and the anti-aging industry is now supplying products presented with a scientific aura. This trend emerged strongly in the 1980s, when an intensive but rather superficial discussion began on themes such as "successful aging," implying that persons who had become chronically ill could not be examples of successful aging even if they handled their situations impressively. Perhaps unintentionally, this has idolized a perspective of life without limitations or suffering, although these are inherent in human life as we know it. These trends recall earlier magical motives that aim

at rejuvenation and immortality (2.3), whereas the major religions and wisdom traditions have tried to reconcile humans with their finite lives.

2.1. From Natural Passivity to Activating Activities for Older People

Long debates have been held in gerontological circles about whether older people should "stay active" or "withdraw" from activities. The two theoretical positions that resurface time and again are known as "activity theory" and "disengagement theory." This debate is the major outcome of an early social scientific research program on aging. By the end of World War II "aging" and "the aged" were put on the agenda of the social sciences in the United States to counterbalance the dominance of medical perspectives. In 1944 this led to the foundation of the Committee on Social Adjustment in Old Age, aimed at developing gerontological activities besides medical-geriatric ones. This was followed in 1945 by the establishment of the Gerontological Society of America with its journals, *The Gerontologist* and *The Journal of Gerontology*.

The dominant theory in the social sciences at that time was structural functionalism, which strongly emphasized harmony and adjustment to the social system (Parsons 1951). There was a strong emphasis on values that were supposedly shared by all "normal" people, who ought to act like a well-functioning part of the social system for the greater well-being of all. There was hardly any attention for social inequality and other serious conflicts of interest or for the circumstances or structural mechanisms that might cause them. Insofar as inequality was discussed, it was understood in a very limited sense and given a positive connotation: each actor would play a specific role in the social system. In other words, according to structural functionalism the society could basically be seen as "one big family"—still a popular theme in festive speeches of the leadership of institutions and organizations and a gross oversimplification and harmonization of the phenomenon of family. As Niklas Luhmann (1996), one of many critics of structural functionalism, has shown, a major reason for this limited way of theorizing was the basic metaphor of the social system as an organism kept alive by its different functional parts that should all function harmoniously to keep the whole organism and its parts alive. Such a model of harmoniously functioning wholes and parts leaves little room for deviance or conflicts, including conflicts of individual and societal interest. Problems that might occur would never be produced by

the overarching system but only by dysfunctional, maladjusted individual actors, who should be corrected.

With such a diagnosis, the dice are thrown for a theory on aging: problems of aging people arise because aging is a heavy burden that must nevertheless be carried, and older people must adjust themselves to their fate without much attention for the question whether this fate was, indeed, inevitable or "natural." Soon the first works pointing in that direction appeared: *Social Adjustment in Old Age* by Otto Pollak and Glen Heathers (1948) and Ruth Cavan's *Personal Adjustment in Old Age* (1949). In these works, the activities of older people were interpreted from the perspective of their "adjustment problems," for it was supposed that older people would find it hard to adjust to their "natural" old age. Cavan devised a classification of activities with which older people could adjust to their age. All types of everyday activities, such as visiting friends or relatives or going to church, were scientifically theorized and classified in terms of age-adequate behavior of older people. In fact, this was hardly a social theory about aging, but rather it was a theory which posed that the problems of aging were mainly caused by a lack of adjustment to natural processes. A proper—that is, "natural"—adjustment would lead to fewer social contacts and to disengagement from society.

From the University of Chicago, one of the most important centers for the early development of gerontology, Beatrice Neugarten carried out extensive research in Kansas City, the "Kansas City Study of Adult Life." Based on this material, in 1961 Cumming and Henry published their famous study that laid the foundations for the disengagement theory: *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement*. Talcott Parsons, the high priest of structural functionalism, wrote the preface to this work, stressing again the naturalness and the importance of disengagement, which would also be a good adjustment to the reality of aging.

Of course, it cannot be denied that processes of senescing will in the long run lead to less vitality, which makes it necessary to rearrange one's life. The only questions are: When? For everybody at the same age? In what way? What will be the consequences for the person's life? The problem with generalizing approaches such as disengagement theory is that individuality and the pluriformity of the processes involved are denied in order to impose a general model that would not only be functionally necessary for a well-organized society but would also be "naturally" grounded. From the dogma of disengagement comes a danger that social contacts and participation in society might

be unnecessarily restricted and that other options do not stand much of a chance. Such participation might be interpreted as symptoms of failing adjustment, as forms of aging that are doomed to come to a bad end because they conflict with social and natural "laws."

Interestingly, in the early 1960s, a period when the supremacy of structural functionalism was gradually undermined, the data from the Kansas City Study of Adult Life were also used to articulate arguments for the archetypal antithesis to disengagement theory: activity theory (defended by Havighurst, among others). According to this theory, it would be both possible and desirable for older people to stay active. Although disengagement theory could point to a solid empirical basis because a large majority of older people did actually disengage, activity theory brought this phenomenon up for discussion and asked whether this withdrawal was as natural and unproblematic as the disengagement theorists claimed. Did not compelling social factors, such as compulsory retirement or rigid ideas about aging, which could indeed be established empirically, underlie the phenomenon? Moreover, the proponents of activity asked, was the actually perceived pattern as universally desirable and "natural" as the advocates of disengagement assumed?

Many of the later debates have been held in terms of this contrast between social resignation and staying active. Such debates are also a sign of new dynamics and opportunities for alternative options in the life course, making it necessary to reflect more deeply on the place of aging in society. An important point in such reflections is that both disengagement and activity occur at all times at any age: no active participation is possible without some space to withdraw. It is always a matter of an adequate context-dependent relation between the two. Forcing persons in one direction, either toward disengagement or activity, will result in problems. Therefore, it appears to be important to leave the possibility of flexible combinations open, allowing room for the specific qualities and circumstances of individuals without creating divisions that are based on chronometric age.

From "Idleness with Dignity" to Being as Being Busy

Being busy is firmly embedded in our tradition: "Idle hands are the devil's workshop"; "It's better to wear out than rust out"; and "There is nobility in labor." However, when the first studies on aging were published at the beginning of the previous century, rest and contemplation—the traditional *Otium cum dignitate* (doing nothing with dignity)—was still considered important for

the well-being of older people. In his book *Geriatrics: The Diseases of Old Age and Their Treatment* (1919), Ignatius Nascher, one of the pioneers of geriatrics, recommended walks along unknown woodland paths as a way of active relaxation, although he thought there would be nothing like fishing as a quiet pastime for older people. G. Stanley Hall, famous for his *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (1922) emphasized that those who had lived long and healthy lives preferred going to bed early and taking their rest.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, this situation has changed dramatically. That we have lost the idealization of "doing nothing" seems less of a problem than the loss of meaningful perspectives for aging. The advocates of activity theory had strong arguments, especially against the claim that it would be "natural" for older people to disengage from society precisely at the time when they had reached retirement age. Yet one of the earlier motives of activity theory, namely, new opportunities for social participation of aging people, had much less effect, especially in Europe, where compulsory retirement is still the general rule. Consequently, activity theory has been especially successful in domains that are specifically organized for "the aged"; its perspective has become a source of inspiration for the phase of life that follows disengagement.

The argument for a higher degree of activity of older people in care institutions gained impetus after Seligman's criticism (1975) of the "learned helplessness" of older people. Such situations may occur, although the staff's lack of time to help will also have helped this theory to become popular, but general activation programs are hardly an adequate answer. It is too readily assumed that being busy as such is beneficial, whereas older people often feel a greater need for social contact or simply want to have a say in what they do or don't do.

Stay Active: "Use It or Lose It"

The somewhat threatening motto "Use it or lose it" has caught on. The most important question is, of course, what is meant exactly and how intentions are put into practice. There is indeed some evidence that continued activity helps to maintain or improve various mental and physical functions, although sound research into this matter is complicated because, in the first place, there is much diversity among aging people, and also because it is difficult to clarify the underlying causality (Aartsen et al. 2002; Gold 1995). Although this kind of research focuses on quantitatively measurable functioning, this does not mean that professionals in institutions should approach older people in the

same functionalist or instrumentalist way. However, as a way to demonstrate the scientifically based quality of their care, test-functionalism has managed to get a firm position in institutions for elderly care. Professional involvement with clients usually begins with some functionally oriented tests aiming at a scientific assessment of the person concerned, thus establishing their "identity" in the institution. The danger of an approach to human actions in terms of functionality is a loss of the *meaning* of such actions: a functional approach reduces a walk together in a beautiful garden to a mechanical process of being (un)able to walk on two feet. Moreover, there is a risk of losing contact with deeper layers of personal experiences. When a person is no longer able to dress herself, this is not only a functional disorder but also a major existential crisis: it appears that the body you have relied on all your life suddenly fails you. The danger of functional tests is that such crises are completely ignored or—even worse—included in the functional scores and explained as symptoms of a psychological-functional disorder of some sort.

There is a difference between, on the one hand, keeping residents of a care facility busy or making them "function" and, on the other hand, communicating with them and encouraging them to participate in what they themselves consider meaningful, interesting, amusing, or important—not because these activities matter, but because *they* matter. Another argument against "Use it or lose it" is its implicit message that older people should continue to function like younger, so-called normal adults would. In other words, this perspective lacks any idea that aging could involve the discovery and development of other abilities and capacities. On the contrary, they can be expected to have crucial experience and knowledge about their specific situation and about how care more generally or living in an institution for long-term care could be improved. Including their resources in participatory action research can lead to a beneficial culture change of care institutions that breaks not only with rigid medicalizing models but also with models of change that are implemented top-down and outside-in (Dannefer et al. 2008; Shura, Siders, and Dannefer 2011).

Crucially important are sensitivity and respect between the persons involved, which means that the availability or the presumed "scientific" relevance of a test of functionality does not immediately justify its application or make it meaningful. Tests can be valuable, but because of their alleged scientific prestige there is often a tendency to elevate them above the communicative context and to forget that applying them involves more than knowledge of the

operation manual. Although this can only be evaluated in specific situations, the many reports and other publications in professional journals dedicated to activities such as *Activities, Adaptation, and Aging* give the impression that a culture of empty and pointless activation and test-functionalism has emerged in many institutions. In order to give such activities a kind of "scientific foundation," extensive typologies have been developed that are connected with levels of cognitive functioning, well-being, "life satisfaction," observations, checklists, and schedules with a dressing of scientific jargon and "managerese." It seems a gross misunderstanding to think that one can interest aging people in anything, really, without being interested in *them.* A person's motives for entering a program or asking for professional attention are often based on a need for personal contact; if this need were responded to more directly, this might change the situation for the better.

Gubrium and Wallace (1990) have tried to detect what has led to such theorizing of activating activities. Their conclusion is that such theories are especially suitable for activity leaders and other professionals to prove their indispensability in an environment controlled by management models. In order to survive in the institutions that employ them, professionals have to show that elderly clients participate in the activities they organize. For this purpose, professionals need not only rhetorical strategies—in other words, impressive terminologies—but also surveys of all activities taking place and what their expertise could add to them. The management at the top will be satisfied if the clients are efficiently kept busy with the employment of few staff.

Institutions tend to dominate the lives of residents who are capable of joining the "activating activities." In case they are more passive because they are ill or disabled, there is often a lack of communication, not because residents do not want it but because staff members do not have enough time to spend with patients (Waterworth 2003). The institutional "cult of time and task," as Henderson (1995) has called it, spreads a chronic disability among the staff: a chronic lack of time (see 1.3).

The path toward a wider range of adjustment activities, beyond the institution, was smoothed in the 1980s when the activities of retired people were systematically assessed as "Leisure Activities." These activities were standardized, classified, mutually correlated, and related to the well-being that would ensue from them (cf. Tinsley et al., 1985). Subsequently, a hazy conviction has widely developed that staying active is required for the "independence," "self-reliance," and "autonomy" of older people. Not only care professionals

but also the aged themselves tend to appropriate these admonitions and think and talk about themselves in these terms—a form of "proto-professionalization." A common reaction of healthy pensioners to the question how they lead their lives is "I have never been so busy in my life" (Ekerdt 1986). In other words, they have a strong sense of keeping up with the rest of society: whatever you do is not important as long as you are busy and stay busy. Being is reconstructed as being busy.

2.2. The Emergence of an Anti-aging Culture

The affluent Western societies are confronted with a relatively young aging population consisting of millions who are considered too old in many ways but are still physically fit, many with substantial incomes. Together with still rising life expectancies and scientific experiments with life extension, these are ingredients for a lively and profitable anti-aging culture where bestsellers have titles like *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old* and *Stop Aging Now! The Ultimate Plan for Staying Young and Reversing the Aging Process*.

Persons who don't feel old but are still treated as such and who should therefore disengage from the central domains of society are seduced by a market that treats them as young or ageless. The same people who were seen as "too old" on the labor market are warmly welcomed on the consumer market, where they are assured that they are not old at all, but young and vital. Should there be any problems, these will quickly be solved by means of the latest products recently developed in the most advanced research. The functionalist logic of disengagement and compensatory activity is continued under the late modern guise of happy consumerism.

"Don't Call 'em Old, Call 'em Consumers!"

What counts, of course, is ageless purchasing power, but this is addressed in a way that redefines age categories. The marketing ideal is the development of a product line for every age group, from very young to very old (Buck 1990; Flanagan 1994; Gunter 1998; Moschis 1996). The organization of lifelong buying is tackled with more fervor than that of lifelong learning.

In fact, the life course as a whole is reconstructed as a chain of age-related market segments, larded with different consumer profiles that are adjusted to differences in purchasing power. The consumer life course starts with prod-

ucts such as special nutrition and diapers. In this phase, young parents are addressed as substitutes for the smallest consumers, but the latter are made to understand at the earliest possible age that they must have the latest products from the right brands to count amongst the other toddlers. In Juliet Schor's research (2005) on the commercial manipulation of the youngest children, the average kindergartner could identify some three hundred logos, and from as early as age two kids were "bonded to brands." Thus they are well prepared to function as consumers in the next stages of the life course, which will offer dazzling new products for every age. Mobility is redefined over the life course in a succession of tricycles, small electric cars, all-terrain bikes, scooters, small fast cars, family cars, and luxury SUVs or sports cars for the successful elderly, followed by campers or more sedate sedans dragging mobile homes. In case someone has difficulty walking, there is the electrically driven caddy with technological novelties according to one's needs and purchasing power. Accommodation over the life course ranges from rooms, flats, and apartments to larger houses and back again to apartments and rooms. Trips and journeys are organized for children, teens, families, and older people, all safely surrounded by insurances so that no harm can possibly come.

However, there is a constant danger of staying alive: *becoming older.* Although all stages of the life course have their own consumer profile, they are not equally respected. The idealization of youthfulness promotes the image of an eternally young adult for whom age and generational differences don't seem to exist. But this image is meant to satisfy the aged, not the young, who will still think that all these people are "old" and that aging should be avoided. Typically, children want to become older, and older people want to stay young. In between, we find young adults who don't bother because age has not yet become an issue and those who are becoming aware that their ages are going up. Here, the anti-aging industry comes to the rescue, reconstructing the life course again by depicting aging as an avoidable decay and offering remedies that can never be consumed too soon. It makes young adults aware of the imminent dangers of staying alive and of what they could do about these dangers, building a billion-dollar industry involving cosmetic surgery, diets, nutritional supplements, resorts, and training regimes. It has a comforting message: although your chronometric age cannot be changed, this is not your "real age," which is something that can be changed once you have established it.

As I have argued in the first chapter, there is some truth in the first part

of this message: chronometric age is an over-rated and rather superficial way to generalize across individuals who are very different. It also relates to the question behind the quest to know the real age: What is my (healthy) life expectancy? The superficiality of chronometric age has been a major concern since the beginning of scientific studies of senescing processes, and it was already systematically addressed in the 1960s. Murray (1951) was one of the first to show that individuals of the same chronometric age could be very different in terms of their functional capacities. This is why time and again attention has been focused on the functionality of the body, particularly on functional levels supposedly connected with the senescing of the "organism," in trying to determine someone's functional age. However, this quest has turned out to be very complicated, and there are some typical conceptual mistakes that repeat themselves.

In the 1960s Murray and others set up a major survey in Boston to examine the concept of "functional age" more closely. It was supposed that a more precise definition of the functional age of individuals would yield more reliable data for life insurances, planning of adequate housing, health facilities, and pension provisions. At the time, this Normative Aging Study was an ambitious project, with a survey population of approximately 2,000 veterans between the ages of 28 and 83 (Katz 2006). Its results were published in 1972 in a special issue of *Aging and Human Development*. The concept of functional age was composed of various dimensions, including biological, personality, and social aspects. The problem was not solved, however, because "functional age" was calibrated by its correspondence with average scores of individuals of a certain chronometric age. Murray used the chronometric age of the test persons as a basis to assess whether someone was relatively "young" or relatively "old": "A man would not be judged physiologically older or younger unless his physiologic age differed by more than 14.7 years from the chronologic age" (Murray 1951, 123; cf. Bookstein and Achenbaum 1993). Thus, the concept that should be questioned remained presupposed in the construction of its alternative.

This conceptual mistake has become typical of the many websites and popular TV programs that claim to assess the "real" age of persons after answering some questions and that assert that this "real" age would be profoundly different from their chronometric age. Surprisingly, however, the questionnaire begins with asking the date of birth. It turns out that the "real" age that is finally computed is not in any way based on functional levels. It is simply the calendar age with years added or subtracted depending on the determined healthi-

ness or unhealthiness of the respondent's lifestyle on the basis of statistics (whatever their origins) regarding the relationship between lifestyle or dietary pattern and mortality risks. This alternative "real" age is calculated in chronometric terms: the conclusion of the tests may therefore be that although you were born fifty-six years ago, your real age would be 58.8 or 53.6 years. To measure these alternative functional ages and to be able to lower them may, however, be more complicated than is suggested. So far it has not been possible to construct a scientifically based functional scale of senescing that could be synchronized with chronometric ages in such a way that we could, even after an extensive battery of physiological measurements, establish the exact functional age of a person. Moreover, since the interaction of human beings with their environment continues to play an important but complicating role, there is little point in detaching individual Internet users from their environments and then comparing them with each other. Apart from such scientific doubts, we can wonder about the popularity of tests in which senescing processes are standardized and measured in chronometric terms in spite of an initial reluctance to rely on chronometric age. Is the aim the feeling that a scientifically founded control of one's life is possible, provided that one has acquired the correct consumptive lifestyle?

There appears to be a profound fear of aging that would make it necessary to monitor one's life as if burglars have to be fended off day and night. "Actively patrolling your health can make your RealAge as much as twelve years younger," one website assures. And what does it actually mean to say that "60 is the new 30"? As far as sensible advice regarding nutrition, smoking, alcohol, seatbelts, or exercise is concerned, this would also be possible without combining it with measuring ages. Even when the image of an ageless adult for whom age and generational differences appear to have dissolved in a youthfulness that extends over the life course is created, it remains a defensive perspective of the "aged." Those who *are* young (which is not the same as wanting to *stay* young) will still think that people that behave this way are old because they have reached a higher age. Paradoxically, in doing this they are creating their problematic future in which they will also try to hold on to their own idealized past appearances.

"Take Years Off Your Looks and Add Them to Your Life"

Late modern culture has created its own struggles: even if one stays healthy, *looking* old becomes a problem. This problem is not without historical prec-

edent, but as both technological innovation and the images of youthfulness are infected with the virus of acceleration, whatever they idealize will be extremely short lived. Although many people may be living longer, they are not respected as this used to be. In *Growing Old in America* (1978), David Hacket Fischer describes how elderly persons in colonial America were still treated with honor and awe. In late modern societies remaining alive beyond a certain age becomes an extended problem; its bodily signs have to be hidden as stigmata so that one will not be recognized as one of those "old people."

This creates a challenge for the marketing experts, who want to turn the many needs of the "baby boomers" into "booming markets" as large numbers of retirees with enormous aggregated spending power enter the market wanting to "enjoy life" from their disengaged position. Moody and Sood (2010) have given a thought-provoking overview of the different strategies that marketers have been using to reach aging customers. Their analysis demonstrates that a direct appeal to the aging public is self-destructive. They want to hear that they are actually not aged, or that senescing would not be visible or even necessary if you buy the right products to conceal or reverse it. Others, who can no longer deny that they have become old, want to hear, "It's OK to age"—as if we would ever say, "It's OK to be an adult" or "It's OK to be young." All the marketing approaches Moody and Sood distinguish (age denial, age adaptation, age irrelevance, and age affirmation) have one element in common: they are strategies to approach aging persons who have problems with being *regarded* as aged. Even when somebody feels fine, there is a widespread "gerontophobic shame": the old person hides her hands, dyes her hair, tries to get rid of wrinkles, and feels she is in the way of all those young hurrying persons even if she evades rush hour. In contrast to acknowledging the dignity of senescing and aging, the anti-aging industry underlines their problematic nature by offering products that promise to solve them. This underlying negative view of aging will also become a burden for young people because they are creating their own problematic future. The baby boomers will be confronted with their illusions about staying young and their negative ideas about aging as they are crowding Golden Pond.

A very lucrative enterprise originates in the quest to keep looking "good" (read: "young"). To exploit this quest there are, for example, special websites *of* women *for* women, where personal testimonies can be found on how much cosmetic surgery helped and how warmly the client was treated as a friend among friends. A solution is offered for all parts of the body that suffer from

Newtonian gravity. The scientifically founded clinic places itself in magical traditions with stunning slogans: "Whoever has dreamed of the fountain of youth will find it in the wrinkle clinic." The overall strategy is to inform and encourage everyone to talk with each other and if necessary with one's doctor about all sorts of problems without mentioning the products; these will be discussed as soon as the consumer has been convinced that he has a problem that can be cured. To break open the market, anything—especially former taboos—should be brought into the open.

One of these taboos is a lessening of sexual preoccupations. In 1901, in his book *What a Man of Forty-Five Needs to Know,* S. Stall called on men to strive for a post-sexual maturity that would enable a wider intellectual and spiritual view, just as Cicero had more than two thousand years ago (see 3.3). Although this admonishment makes a rather peculiar patriarchal impression, and the dramatic significance of the age of 45 is rather arbitrary, it appears that late modern culture represents the other extreme. In the obsessive self-preoccupation of the anti-aging culture, any diminishing sexual interest is made into something problematic for which all kinds of commercial solutions are offered, presented in a terminology of empowerment and emancipation (King and Calasanti 2006).

The man who has reached "the years of discretion" but does not want to miss anything surfs to one of the websites sponsored by pharmaceutical multinationals such as Pfizer, "dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of innovative medicines for humans and animals," or Abbott Laboratories, which claims "men's health as one of the areas of special attention." In a sympathizing way, the potential client is steered into the website. Whatever the problem—fear of failure, stress, depression—there is help in the form of the most advanced science, which serves as a medium inspiring confidence, promising to take away anything that might be a burden. In consulting the website, each interested person will become an expert who can assess his problems so that he will be a well-informed partner in the discussion with his doctor. And of course, women are not forgotten: they might have "Female Sexual Arousal Disorder (FSAD)," a vaguely described but "widespread and age-connected" problem, according to many websites. It goes without saying that there are also many solutions on offer for such problems.

A new sexual revolution is taking place. The first revolution separated sexuality from reproduction. This time, the revolution is aimed at the infinite continuation of sexual preoccupations: "forever functional" (Katz and Mar-

shall 2003; Marshall and Katz 2002). Diminished interest, a so-called "sexual dysfunction," is seen as an age-connected complaint for which many possible cures are offered. In order to sell these products, purveyors make specious arguments—for example, the claim that sexual decline causes relationship problems and a breakdown of family life. Anyone who is not continuously eager to have sex is in danger of sexual dysfunction. Thus, products for regenerating sexuality should be part of the lifestyle of the late modern male.

Until recently, such remedies as, for example, the horn of the rhinoceros (an animal still killed for that purpose), were considered somewhat ridiculous or even downright outrageous. As in many cases, the desire for continuing health is used as a motivation to begin a transformation toward adopting a "healthy lifestyle" by making a problem of situations that were not previously experienced as a problem, sensitizing the customer for the need to buy products that would solve the new problem. Fortunately, there are still stories about continuing love beyond a "sexually healthy" lifestyle:

> It is a gradual process, but at a certain moment you realize that your overall sexual behavior has become more calmed down and you experience an increase in tenderness. You much more enjoy the simple fact that you are together. My wife and I are much happier than we have ever been, and for the past few years I have been very much in love with her. It is not so that life gets boring after sixty, seventy, only you do not live in primary colors anymore, as you do when you are young. You live in violet and purple, but these are very beautiful shades indeed. Some men among my acquaintances are persistently trying Viagra and other such products. I do not understand them at all. I think they are terribly mistaken and cannot find the peace to see what they do have. (quoted in Baars 2006b)

Here too, we see the ambivalence of late modern aging. On the one hand, it is understandable that older people wish to detach themselves from societal mechanisms and cultural prejudices that prematurely write them off. On the other hand, traditional images of aging that assert its importance and prestige are mostly rigid and stuffy. The resulting lack of inspiration reflects the empty nature of the dominant time perspective in which aging is perceived and organized, making aging an easy prey for a commercial industry that has an excellent intuition for these tensions, insecurities, and frustrations. This may have dubious effects, for example, when consumers become followers of lifestyles developed by pharmaceutical industries, embarking on health regimes, swapping one product for another, and evading any test of the soundness of these

products in the longer term—beyond the life cycle of a particular product. And there is another problem: as these strategies possibly involve the creation of huge markets, it is not surprising that according to recent surveys the pharmaceutical industry is much more interested in the development of "lifestyle drugs" than in developing medicines for rare and thus less lucrative diseases or for diseases that are predominant in poor countries.

In the last decades, scientific research on long-term effects of specific lifestyles, including issues such as nutrition, smoking, alcohol use, and exercise, has led to more understanding and to healthier lifestyle practices for a minority of people. Nevertheless, trends such as increasing obesity worry researchers to such an extent that they speak of a "lifestyle diseases time bomb" (Gluckman and Hanson 2006), and one wonders whether these developments might be connected. It appears that the anti-aging industry plays an important intermediary role here: it sells products that may be based on scientific research, but the quasi-magical images used by this commercial industry in its zeal to sell health, beauty, and everlasting youth are too artificial to be trustworthy. They promote cynicism in many people, because for them the distance between reality and ideal is too enormous to bridge. These frustrations are effectively addressed by the fast-food industry, which offers immediate satisfaction without the need to delay gratification for a goal that will remain utopian. The fast food consumers suspect that they are being misled: those seemingly ageless, eternally slim and healthy models, insofar as they represent real persons at all, will also age and are just as vulnerable and mortal as they are.

A fundamental objection to the anti-aging culture as a whole is that the emerging possibilities of late modern aging are deformed by the illusion that limitations and suffering are not a part of life but a result of bad *management* of life—as if bad investments give bad results. This fits into a worldview in which everyone is primarily or even exclusively responsible for his own well-being and the market has become the only entity guarding the well-being of us all. Aging well is reconstructed as a commercial undertaking in which you keep investing in your person and buying your own future through financial security, pharmaceutical fixes, and an "optimal" lifestyle from which you will reap the sweet fruits while others will be left with the bitter fruits of their "suboptimal choices." It is an artificial image of life that ignores limitations and distorts the dignity of sufferings that are inherent to human life by redefining them as examples of failing control. In the following section it will become

clear that such tendencies are not new, although they have assumed a new technological aura.

2.3 The Much-desired Long and Invulnerable Life: Magic and Magic Technology

The desire not only to live better and improve living conditions for everyone but to escape senescing and death has a long and interesting history. The Greek mythological tales of the Argonauts tell us of the sorceress Medea, who transformed her father-in-law, Aeson, into a young man by cutting him into pieces and boiling him in fragrant spices, tomato, cypress, and, of course, magic herbs. Those herbs did the trick, for when the malicious Medea showed the daughters of Pelias the splendidly rejuvenated Aeson and seduced them into trying to do the same for their old father, things came to a bad end. They didn't have the necessary magic herbs, and nothing remained of Pelias but the pieces.

A long patriarchal tradition asserts itself not only in tales about sorceresses and witches but also in discrimination against older women. Through the ages there have been numerous images of rejuvenation in which old women are carried into the "fountain of youth" only to step out later as young and attractive virgins, as we can see in a famous painting by Lucas Cranach. In other images old women are no longer boiled, as in the tale of Medea, but are directly thrown into a fire to emerge from it reborn and rejuvenated as a Phoenix. A woodcarving from around 1550 shows a rejuvenating oven for old women. Carried on the backs of their husbands or wheeled in on barrows, they walk away energetically afterward, having paid the master of this drastic anti-aging clinic.

In the seventeenth century, these magic images change under the influence of early modern scientific and technological approaches. The windmill, one of the most powerful and impressive forms of technology at the time, was used as an imaginary instrument to bring about rejuvenation. The oldest representation of this anti-aging technology is from the Netherlands and depicts an "old bags mill," which turns old women into young and elegantly dressed ladies.

This Dutch technology can also be found in later German and Swedish prints and in tales about a Walloon "Marvelous Mill," which would not only rejuvenate women, but also free them from bad habits, such as drinking coffee, gossiping, and coquettish behavior (De Meyer 1964). In these last examples we can see how the hope for rejuvenation has changed from magic incantations to technological control, a tendency that fits the general program

Fig 2.1 Rejuvenating Oven for Old Women. Woodcarving by Anthony Corthoys (about 1550)

of rational control over nature that was one of the main ambitions of early modernity (see 4.2). Even the famous Francis Bacon was engaged in scientific research on the prolongation of life. In 1632 he published a manual in Latin that was translated into English as *The Historie of Life and Death, with Observations Naturall and Experimentall for the Prolongation of Life*. In it he advised using tobacco, opiates, betel nuts, and sex to stay young, since all these had a "firing" effect and thus fought senescing, which according to traditional Galenic insights consisted of "dehydration" and "chilling." This belief brought him an early death. He caught a cold when carrying out an experiment in which he tried to prove that meat can be kept fresh by frosty air and then insisted that he should be nursed in a damp bed in order to prevent the feared "dehydration." He died of pneumonia.

Other historical anticipations of the anti-aging culture are less technologi-

Fig 2.2 Old Bags' Mill. Woodcarving (about 1600)

cally oriented and focus more on rational self-control and extensive documentation of people who have lived very long. In Padua, Luigi Cornaro published in 1558 a treatise on a method of rigorous self-control: *Discorsi della vita sobria*. It was eagerly read throughout the seventeenth century and translated into practically all European languages, usually in combination with a treatise on how to prolong life by Leonardo Lessio. There were fifty editions of Cornaro's treatise in England. The first, published in 1634, was entitled *Treatise of Temperance and Sobrietie*. It included a translation of Lessio's *Hygasticon or the right Course of preserving Health* and a translation of another Italian essay, *A paradox that a more spare diet is better than a splendid or sumptuous*. In 1711 Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator* that Cornaro's work was written "with such a spirit of cheerfulness, religion and good sense, as are the natural concomitants of temperance and sobriety."

Since the Renaissance, there has been a continuous interest in the issue of prolongation of life, or rather, the delay of death (Gruman 2003; Metchnikoff 2004). This discussion already focused on chronometric issues such as how to live as long as possible and who had lived the longest. The general orientation, however, was one of rational argumentation and empirical evidence, although these were relatively undeveloped. The proof that a long life would be possible was sought in stories about centenarians and how they had lived so long. Ac-

cording to historians, Luigi Cornaro painted an attractive but unreliable portrait of his life as a centenarian to convince his readers of the effectiveness of his method, for he died most probably in his eighties. The followers of Cornaro wrote extensive reports on people who reached the age of one hundred and more, all of them "proofs" that the maximum life span was attainable for all who had the self-control required. A well-known example was John Perry, who is alleged to have died in 1653 at the age of 152 years. Reports on his deeds include his two marriages, one at the age of 80, the other at 120. William Harvey, discoverer of the circulation of blood, performed a postmortem on Perry's body, concluding that Perry had died of a too-lavish lifestyle in his final years.

In the eighteenth century many books were published in this popular genre, including *An Essay on Health and Long Life* by George Cheyne (1725), and *Medicina Gerocomica: Or the Galenic Art of Preserving Old Men's Healths explain'd* by Sir John Floyer (1724). In 1796 the physician Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland caused great consternation in the German-speaking world, even provoking a critique by Immanuel Kant, with a book that appeared a year later in English as *Macrobiotics, or the Art of Prolonging Human Life*. James Easton's *Human Longevity,* published in 1799, formed the pinnacle of this type of argumentation, listing 1,712 people who had lived more than a hundred years.

Well into the nineteenth century, many books were published in which the lives of people of a ripe old age were extensively discussed, urging the reader to take on a frugal way of life. Gradually, however, the demand for another type of argumentation arose as developments in pathological anatomy brought awareness of the relevance of tissues, cells, and their pathological changes. From this time on, what was formerly known as old age became increasingly medicalized, and death began to be seen as the result of an illness that could not be fought effectively.

This new approach meant that the earlier form of argumentation came under critique. In 1873 William Thoms, in *Human Longevity: Its Facts and its Fictions,* expressed his skepticism about the stories of all those centenarians who would have lived such exemplary virtuous and long lives. Most arguments were extremely thin indeed: usually sons who had the same name as their fathers claimed with their father's birth certificates to be, for instance, 120 years old, although they were actually in their eighties or nineties. And who lived long enough to control or contest these claims in a time when photographs and fingerprints did not exist? William Thoms's critical work caused much annoyance, however, since he questioned the life spans of the most famous

champions of vital life such as Thomas Parr, still honorably buried in Westminster Abbey, or Henry Jenkins, for whom a memorial had been erected in Yorkshire. In contrast to what we would expect based on contemporary studies of longevity, these famous super-centenarians were all men, another demonstration of a long patriarchal tradition in which only men really counted.

Gradually, testimonies of long lives were no longer used as evidence of the possibility of healthy aging, and attention shifted to statistical demographic measurements made possible by the work of early statisticians such as Adolphe Quetelet. These developments changed, for instance, the basis of life insurance, which had been around for centuries but had never before been based on statistics of survival or mortality. Aging is no longer the field of heroic self-control by people who become more admired as they live longer but gradually becomes a medicalized, unproductive remainder after the lapse of the most vigorous years. Because such a vision of aging could hardly encourage aging people, and since the scientific world did not engage itself very much with this issue before the last decades of the twentieth century, there was for a long time an interest in exotic cultures that were said to experience much longer lives. Late examples of this interest are *The Centenarians of the Andes* by David Davies (1975) or *The Prolongevity of Soviet Georgia* by Pitskhelauri (1982).

As we can see, the modern struggle for rational control over nature is fought on two fronts. The first front consists of a struggle to control the inner nature, which has been a basic task in the formation of the modern "autonomous subject" who had to learn rational self-control and discipline. We saw the extension of this type of autonomy in the impressive examples of attempts to live very long and vigorous lives through self-discipline in Luigi Cornaro and his followers. Some trends of the anti-aging industry that emphasize a correct and healthy lifestyle continue this tradition, although they can hardly advertise the austerity propagated by Cornaro. This is compensated by advertising the products that are acquired through the progress that is made (or said to be made) on the second front: the battle for control over objectified natural processes by means of scientifically based technology. In a consumerist culture, this approach has the important advantage that the necessity to control or restrict oneself has receded to the background. Many contemporary dreams about future health care have this element of surrendering to technological control that would, for instance, be constantly vigilant inside the body by nano-technological monitoring of health states and administering the needed medicines automatically.

Expectations of what genetic or other technologies will be able to achieve run

high. Often they are voiced in magic or religious terminology. "The Holy Grail has been found!" was a jubilant press release during the World Congress of Gerontology in Adelaide in 1997. Scientific discoveries are presented in mythical terms of a heroic search for salvation and immortality, as if the fallible design of humanity can finally be re-created, but this time perfectly. Then we will no longer feel embarrassment about being not so perfect, calculable, and exchangeable as technological products—an embarrassment described so probingly by Günther Anders (1956) as "Promethean shame." In such a world, where aging humans are portrayed as configurations of badly functioning parts, living longer will become a matter of maintenance, transplantation, or implantation of technical equipment or organs that are specially cultivated for such purposes. As long as senescing and death appear to be an unavoidable fate, the advanced fantasies of trans-humanistic techno sites have suggested "downloading" the contents of the human brain, presumably the most individual part of a person in cybernetic equipment. In that way the "technological soul" of a person may have to leave the mortal body as long as this cannot be prevented, but it will enter the digital hereafter, where it will not only be "eternally saved" but also still able to communicate from the "afterlife" with those that are left behind.

In this field of exploring the possible futures of senescing, intriguing hypotheses, serious scientific research, and fantasies intermingle. Many scientists are worried by the products that are offered to the general public, pretending to eliminate senescing or reverse it. In a manifesto titled "No Truth to the Fountain of Youth," some of them criticize what they regard as unfounded and often irresponsible pretensions that seduce people into using all sorts of products that may be detrimental to their health (Olshansky, Hayflick, and Carnes 2002; cf. Mehlmann et al. 2004; Post and Binstock 2004). Such criticism is typically answered by representatives of the anti-aging industry by venturing their opinions about the "gerontological establishment." It is alleged that this "establishment" feels threatened by the huge progress that would be made by "independent" researchers who are no longer led by academic conservatism and prejudices about the inevitability of senescing. In that fashion, the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine projects itself as a nonprofit organization of volunteers supported by doctors and scientists who are convinced that senescing is not inevitable. These skirmishes are the visible surface of an opaque complex of many different research programs, huge commercial interests, and a widely shared protest of aging people against the uncertainty of their futures.

As soon as aging is medicalized, death tends to be seen as the result of an illness that can not be fought effectively. According to the most prestigious classification of death causes, the "International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems," "old age" cannot be a cause of death (Hayflick and Moody 2003). This scientific classification has existed for more than fifty years and has been improved many times, but already in the first formulation of the ICD "old age" was dropped as a possible cause of death. Another 130 possible causes remained, but "old age" or senescing were not among them. Since this classification is used in the completion of legal death certificates, it might, according to Leonard Hayflick, even be illegal to declare that someone died of old age. There is no room for natural causes of death, although there is a category of unnatural causes (i.e., accidents and crimes).

In this statistical world, far away from life as it is experienced, categories and calculations must be used with care. Statistics may not only seem to be able to dispel causes of death, but they can also give the impression that many more people succumb to a specific disease as a "cause of death" than is actually the case. In 1998 there was an increase of around 50 percent in deaths caused by Alzheimer's disease in many countries. This increase was completely due to the revisions of the tenth version of the ICD, since various forms of dementia that were still distinguished in the ninth version were now categorized under "Alzheimer." What might appear on the surface as a sudden epidemic outbreak of Alzheimer's disease was no more than the result of statistical operations, a so-called statistical artifact. Another flaw in this seemingly exact statistical picture is that toward the end of their lives many aging people suffer from several complaints at the same time (comorbidity), so that it is generally not clear which of these was fatal in the end. In this context there is a distinction between *primary* causes of death: ("the starting point in the sequence of events leading to death," according to the ICD-10) and *secondary* causes of death, which contributed to the death either as complications of the primary cause or as separate complaints. To a certain degree postmortems can give definite answers; however, researchers have shown that 40–50 percent of the causes of death registered on death certificates were incorrect (Leibovitz et al. 2001).

A Fundamental Vulnerability

Statistical overviews of health-related causes of death can also be criticized from another angle: according to Hayflick, none of the 130 possible causes of death mentioned in the ICD-10 (besides accidents) are responsible for our

dying at an advanced age. According to Hayflick, individuals over the age of 75 die as a result of a continual decrease of physiological capacity, which results in an increasing vulnerability (Hayflick 1996; Hayflick and Moody 2002). He holds that the primary cause of death at higher ages lies in the senescing of the body. It would therefore actually be irrelevant and misleading to put one of the officially recognized causes of death on the death certificate, since the fundamental characteristic of processes of senescing is an increasing vulnerability; specific illnesses are secondary phenomena.

Although there is no evidence for the special significance of the age of 75, Hayflick's main point is that all attention for age-related diseases does not result in more understanding of the processes of senescing. In contrast to disease, senescing is a process we can perceive anywhere: fish, mammals, and flowers show signs of senescing once they are fully grown. Even technical constructions, such as cars and airplanes show symptoms of decay (wear, metal fatigue), which makes older planes more vulnerable than new ones. Planes and cars differ from animals and humans, which have capacities in themselves to solve certain problems and to regenerate. According to Hayflick, the main point of research into senescing processes would be to decipher these interactive processes of degeneration and regeneration. In this book I steer away from biological issues, but I include Hayflick's perspective in discussing human aging as an existential process in which a fundamental, much broader vulnerability shared by all humans increases as people are living through time (see 6.1). Of course, respecting the vulnerability and finitude of life does not imply that problems can be evaded and that unnecessary suffering should not be removed or mitigated. Much suffering stems not from existential limitations (see 6.3) but from social constellations in which resources are extremely unevenly distributed, leading to cumulative advantage and disadvantage over the life course (Dannefer 2003a; Ferraro and Shippee 2009).

Conclusions

Aging in late modern society is caught between two contradictory desires—the desire to live longer and the desire to remain young. The tense reconciliation of these desires conflicts not only with the opinions of young people about aging people but also with the dominant strategies on the labor market that define workers as "older" when they become older than 50 or even 40 years of age (see 1.2). After their "disengagement," the intended destiny of

"the aged" is to remain active in domains that are set apart for them and to become happy consumers on a market that must avoid addressing them as aged because this would conflict with their youthful self-image. Late modern life not only suffers under a regime of acceleration, an amplification of the means to disrupt silence, and an intensification of strategies to catch the attention for marketing purposes, but also suffers under the dominance of "youthfulness" and "dynamic life." These images revolve around sexual activism, noncommitment, and carefree consumption. Of course, full attention for young people is justified because young people deserve to grow up under optimal circumstances, and any society must take its future into account. However, in the present situation adults are written off prematurely not only on the labor market but also in the sense of being deviant from idealized somatic images. The reverse of the cultural idealization of youthful attraction is a costly and burdening acceleration of the "societal senescing" of people who do not meet the somatic norm of youthfulness.

Moreover, whether even young people benefit from the commercially manipulated cult of youth is questionable. Even when they can enjoy the rare feeling of meeting the dominant ideal, they must worry that no wrinkle will appear or hair be lost. The cult of being young evokes a *gerontophobia,* a fear of aging, which often begins at a much earlier age than one would expect. It is already a main theme among people in their twenties and thirties, who are afraid of committing themselves, of "tying themselves down," and who see the first wrinkles and bags that appear with disgust. The media concentrate on idols who are cut to perfection, making the symptoms of physical senescing problematic in order to sell products to fight these symptoms.

Little remains of aging but "living long": the triumph of an empty chronometric understanding of life. The major discourses about aging show this narrow focus on the length of lives. On the one hand, the life expectancies at birth are seen as an indication of the quality of life in a particular country; on the other hand, governments are worried about these prognoses. Not only those who are falling prey to chronic disease but also the happy retirees or well-off baby boomers seem to challenge societal resources because it is feared that they will live very long, possibly too long, at the cost of younger generations (Buckley 2007; Robertson 1991; 1997; a major problem that is expressed in "burdens," "dependency ratios," and "generational accounting" (Kotlikoff 1993). Although intergenerational relations undeniably have an important budgetary aspect, there is an overwhelming presence of discourses in which

aging is reduced to a chronometric calculus—counting ages, durations, and their consequences in terms of costs. Often it seems as if there is, on the one hand, an intensive effort to keep people healthy, to help them live longer, and, on the other hand, a shrinking back from the budgetary consequences of these efforts. Moreover, the dominance of youthfulness and the one sided-emphasis on the length of lives hamper the exploration of the possible meanings or qualities of aging and of what aging people might contribute to society.

The wish to live longer presupposes that a longer life is by definition a better life. Although there is no reason to belittle efforts to live longer—since being alive is a precondition for everything we want to do or experience—a longer life is only something to strive for if life is good; in itself, the idealization of a longer life amounts to not wanting to die. The mere duration of life is hardly an adequate criterion to judge its quality: it is not only possible to die too early, but also to die too late (see 6.3).

The desire to escape senescing and death by means of rejuvenation, immortality, or rebirth appears to have deep anthropological and historical roots. Whereas the major religions and wisdom traditions have tried since their premodern origins to assuage the fear of dying and to reconcile humans with their finite lives, magical practices have tried to overcome the limits of finite life. Because these practices contradict such fundamental conditions of human life as its vulnerability and finitude, they create illusions and tend to draw the attention away from the uniqueness of this life that we live here and now. Although the anti-aging industry has many faces, one of them is a magical belief in products that would reverse senescing or bring immortality. Behind this belief is still the fear of dying, for the unavoidable fate of the "losers" all of us will be in the end, a deep and deeply humane fear that is shared by all who love to live. It must, however, be faced and included in the ways in which we think about life. After all, even a much longer life is still finite, and finitude has a profound meaning for human life in all phases (see 6.3).

That magical hopes and practices resurface in the midst of the late modern biotechnology may be a surprise for those who think that modern science has clearly superseded magical traditions. There is, however, a cultural motive for this revival: as modern science and technology have enlarged rational control over our lives, we are losing the ability to confront what remains uncontrollable. What evades control is just seen as something that has *not yet* been clarified scientifically and subsequently brought under technological control. The success of the scientific and technological control over nature

both within and outside human beings has led to the creation of a profound irrationality within an instrumentally reduced rationality. This irrationality stems from the desire to achieve complete control over nature, although those who want to control nature remain a part of this same nature. Consequently, the unreflected efforts to achieve perfect control know only one answer to a failure, which is to try to develop more control (Baars 1987). This approach, which has been characteristic of the development of science and technology throughout modernity (see 4.2), has brought us progress in many ways, but its limitations are an inability to deal with situations that cannot be controlled. I argue in this book that such situations are inherent in life and radicalize in aging. Because it is hard to predict which problems that are as yet uncontrollable can be brought under a technological regime and which cannot, life as such remains vulnerable and finite. Its unpredictability may be unpractical in certain respects, but it is deeply connected with qualities that are also appreciated in late modern culture such as spontaneity, discovery, creativity, and uniqueness.

One of the problems that results from the lopsided orientation toward control is the endangered dignity of those who are confronted with the realities of vulnerability, finitude, and loss. They are the unwelcome reminders that such existential situations are inherent in life. Insofar as the striving for technological dominance is continually confronted with its shortcomings, the reminders of this tragic failure are in a risky position. The implicit promise of a controllability of life is closely linked with the child's wish—"later, when I have grown up"—to be able to do or to have everything in a perfect form whenever I want it. This wish clashes with the fundamental condition that life must be lived with unique, imperfect, and vulnerable bodies. To lose this preoccupation is not the end of life but opens other perspectives. To enrich the understanding of aging, it may be worthwhile to investigate whether premodern approaches to aging have something to say that would be important. After all, people in earlier eras did not have the possibilities of controlling the many hazards of life such as bad hearing and eyesight, infections, tuberculosis, or appendicitis that we have. Faced with a risk of dying at any moment and any age, they developed an art of life and an idea of wisdom that may still inspire us.

3

A Passion for Wisdom and the Emergence of an Art of Aging

A boy, an ungrown child, in seven years puts forth
a line of teeth and loses them again;
but when another seven God has made complete,
the first signs of maturity appear.
In the third hebdomad he's growing yet, his chin
is fuzzy, and his skin is changing hue,
while in the fourth one, each achieves his peak of strength,
the thing that settles whether men are men.
The fifth is time a man should think of being wed
and look for sons to carry on his line;
and the sixth he's altogether sensible,
no more disposed to acts of fecklessness.
With seven hebdomads and eight—fourteen more years—
wisdom and eloquence are at their peak,
while in the ninth, though he's still capable, his tongue
and expertise have lost some of their force.
Should he complete the tenth and reach the measured line,
not before time he'd have his due of death. SOLON, SIXTH CENTURY BC

Introduction

Although living conditions have become much better for aging people, especially for those who are well off, there may still be some things to learn from premodern cultures. However, although the ancient Greeks and Romans are often associated with respect for the aged, who were seen as embodiments of wisdom, it will become clear in what follows that this was hardly the case. But that does not mean that these cultures cannot teach us some important lessons. In this chapter I concentrate on what the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers had to say about aging, beginning with a short description of the way they thought about the life course (3.1). It will turn out that wisdom was not directly connected with aging, but paradoxically, this is why the Socratic

concept of wisdom might still be valuable for late modern aging (see also 6.2). To get an adequate idea of Socratic wisdom, we must see it in connection with the different philosophical schools that prepared young persons for public office and taught them how to live well (3.2). Philosophy had not yet become the professional theoretical work that we can see today in our universities; it was also a practical way of life and an art of living. In this section I present the major philosophical schools and especially what their founders had to say about aging.

In 3.3 I will elaborate on the Roman Stoics and especially on the work of Cicero, who extended the tradition of the philosophical art of life to include an art of aging—or, to remain in Cicero's way of thinking, a way of living well in a rather static phase of life called "old age." Although his views are undeniably those of the rich senior statesman, they shed an interesting light on late modern aging (3.4) because the way of living of the Roman elite, who did not have to exhaust themselves physically, has become a more general lifestyle.

3.1. Early Greek Thought about the Life Course

Although the chronometric life course is a relatively recent phenomenon, distinguishing between persons according to their ages has been common practice throughout history because growing up and getting an education takes many years and human lives are finite. This doesn't mean that ages were always measured in chronometric terms. Even people in some contemporary tribal cultures may be well aware of their place in the tribal age structure but don't know their calendar age because it has no significance in their culture (Fry 1999). In the same way, we can find many different narratives about aging and phases of life in archaic Greek culture, but even when they mention calendar ages or count years, this does not mean that such distinctions have the same meaning as we would expect. For instance, Homer mentions age and numbers of years, but these are not meant as exact measurements (L. Nash 1978).

Often distinctions between the ages of (usually) males were made in particular contexts. For instance, in the Homeric *Iliad,* which is primarily an epic of war, a difference is made between those who are too young to be warriors, like the boy Astyanax; young warriors in their prime, like Achilles; mature warriors, like Odysseus; and finally, elders like Priam or Nestor. In Hesiod's *Work and Days* we encounter distinctions between nonproductive children, young workers, mature laborers, heads of households, and *gerontes,* who are

supported in their old age (Falkner 1989; 1995). But there were also divisions of the human life course based on the (often astrologically interpreted) movements of the cosmos, such as the one by Pythagoras (sixth century BC), who distinguished four stages of twenty years that were characterized by the seasons as they were typically experienced in Greece.

Although many versions have been handed down to us, there was an underlying common categorization of the life course that also indicated when someone would be considered to have grown "old" (Garland 1990). Homer (eighth century BC) distinguished four stages of life, with a different course for the two sexes after the stage of the child (*pais*) (Eyben 1989). A boy turned into an adolescent (*neos, kouros*), after which he would reach the vigor of life (*akme*), and, probably between 50 and 60 years old, he was considered to have become an old man (*geron, presbys*). A girl went through stages that were predominantly determined by her childbearing capacity: first the fertile, unmarried state; then that of the fertile, married woman (*gyne*), and finally the stage of the old woman (*graia, presbytis*). The dissimilar senescing of man and woman would often lead to the marriage of a 30-year-old man with a 15-year-old woman. On that occasion the groom's father might transfer his authority and privileges within the family to his son. This son, in turn, had the authority and privileges for some thirty years until his eldest son reached the age of thirty and the cycle started again. In this structure, which must have known many variations, a man was considered old at 60, and a woman at 45, when she had reached the end of her fertility. In his design for an ideal but rather authoritarian state, Plato determines the prime of life as the best time to produce offspring for the state. A woman would begin to "bear for the state" at the age of 20 and continue until the age of 40; a man would "beget for the state" from the moment "he passes his prime in swiftness in running," which would supposedly be at the age of 30, until the age of 55 (Plato, *Republic* 460e).

Generally, a man was considered to have entered old age at about 60. In Athens a man was exempted from military service once he was 59. In Sparta, a city-state with some strong gerontocratic traditions, noblemen could stand as candidates for the senior council (*Gerousia*) when they were 60. Compared to the average life span of those days, these were advanced ages.

Since there were no general pension systems, people without means were obliged to work as long as they were able. When work was no longer possible, older people were dependent on their family's favor, especially that of their adult sons. Greek literature often highlights the tragic implications of this

dependence when heroic fights left the parents of the young heroes killed in battle unattended.

Underneath the respect for wise old leaders lies a terrifying old age. There are many examples showing that the Greeks looked upon old age with horror. To them it was a phase of bodily decay and deterioration. In his epic *Odyssey,* Homer illustrates the contrast between manly vigor and decrepit old age by recounting how Pallas Athena managed to transform the hero Odysseus into an old man: "She withered the fair flesh on his supple limbs, and destroyed the flaxen hair from off his head, and about all his limbs she put the skin of an aged old man. And she dimmed his two eyes that were before so beautiful."

We can still appreciate in their marble statues how the ancient Greeks admired the innocent young female and the heroic, vigorous young male body. Old age was seen as one of the evils from Pandora's box, which had been emptied on mankind because of disobedience to the gods. According to Hesiod, old age was not the original fate of man but a punishment, as were diseases, toil, and women. The Greeks saw the process of aging as one of desiccation. There is an instructive myth about the handsome young *Tithon,* with whom *Eos,* the goddess of dawn, had fallen in love. She begged *Zeus* to make him immortal but forgot to ask for eternal youth. Handsome *Tithon* in his immortality shriveled into a cricket. This image recurs in some descriptions of senior councils, like this one from book 3 of Homer's *Iliad:*

> Too old to fight now, but excellent counselors
> Think of cicadas perched on a branch
> Their delicate voices shrill in the woods
> Such were the voices of the Trojan elders.

The Greeks had gods for almost anything and anybody, yet not for old age. Nor was there a god who was old, for the gods were above old age and death. The eldest among the Olympic gods were bearded men full of vitality and eager for amorous adventures. There was no room for old age in the ideal world the Greeks created for their gods. However, they had *Geras,* a malevolent spirit (*daimon*) of old age, whom the Romans called *Senectus*. The goddess *Nyx* (Night) bare *Geras* along with such unpleasant creatures as *Moros* (Doom), black *Ker* (Violent Death), *Momos* (Blame), and *Oizys* (Misery). One of the lesser-known plights of Heracles was to wrestle with Geras, a scene portrayed on a *pelike* (an amphora-like wine container) found in the Paris Louvre, where we see Geras as a shrunken old man with no obvious physical strength. His powers

may be hidden, but they work steadily, suddenly pressing upon mortals with his full force so that they will be unable to move or lift their limbs. A Homeric hymn warns: "Harsh Geras will soon enshroud you—ruthless age which stands someday at the side of every man, deadly, wearying, dreaded even by the gods."

In this view old age is feared, but it encounters little compassion. There is no god to take care of this phase of life, and without some compensation through personal qualities or material means, the chances for old men to encounter some respect were slim. For old women the situation was even worse: insofar as old women are present in Greek mythology, they are depicted with horror and are associated with death, curses, and revenge. Some less-appealing female offspring of the goddess *Nyx* were the *Moirai* (Fates), who were in charge of the threads of life. These reputedly ugly old sisters were thought to be severe, inflexible, and stern: *Klotho* spun the thread of life at the birth of every mortal, *Lakhesis* measured it, and *Atropos* cut it. They were related to the three *Erinyes* (Furies), who avenged crimes against the natural order of the cosmos such as homicide or crimes against the gods. *Alecta, Tisiphone,* and *Megaera* were imagined as terrible female spirits—ugly old women with hair, arms, and waists entwined with poisonous serpents, wielding whips to hunt up their victims. To complete the negative imagery of older women, the treacherous white-foaming waves that were feared by the seafaring Greeks were straightforwardly called *Graiai* (Old Women), pictured in Greek mythology as three old sisters who shared one eye and one tooth among them.

Solon's Untraditional Views

Solon's famous poem that is the epigraph for this chapter can also be seen as a vigorous response to the "old age elegy" of the Ioanian poet Mimnermus (seventh century BC):

> . . . when painful age
> comes on, that makes a man loathsome and vile,
> malignant troubles ever vex his heart;
> seeing the sunlight gives him joy no more.
> He is abhorred by boys, by women scorned:
> so hard a thing God made old age to be. (in M. L. West 1993, 28)

This elegy expressed a denigration of old age that appears to have been quite common in Greek culture. As Mittelstrass observes: "It was not the form of existence of a god that was the ideal of human aspiration but rather Achilles,

who was a youth until his death. It was not the finitude but the process of aging and growing old that was negated" (2003, 490).

Solon, however, opposes this denigration and maintains that even in the ninth hebdomad, when processes of senescence are beginning to manifest, the old man is "still capable." In another famous quotation, Solon emphasizes the value of a long life as a time to continue to learn: "As I grow old I'm always learning more" (in M. L. West 1993, 79). This sentence was also meant as a critique of ignorant idealizations of tradition. By emphasizing that it is crucial to learn and not just to reproduce traditional patterns of thought and action, Solon anticipated an important characteristic of the Greek concept of wisdom that would begin to flourish a century later in Athens: wisdom is not acquired just by living a long time, but it has to be gained in a lifelong dedication to learning and thinking.

Solon's poem has often been seen as a mere example of a widespread genre, but according to Thomas Falkner (1990), the very premise of the poem entails a rewording of age in an untraditional way (cf. Ehrenberg 1989; Lewis 2006). Not that the use of hebdomads (7-year periods) was new; both the Egyptian and the Jewish tradition often used hebdomads in their narratives. The Jewish narrative about the creation of the earth, for instance, ends with the rest of the Creator, on the seventh day, from all the work he had done. Solon's poem is revolutionary because it does not distinguish static phases but instead emphasizes developments that take place *within* the seven-year periods: he "puts forth a line of teeth and loses them again"; "the first signs of maturity appear"; "he's growing yet, his chin is fuzzy, and his skin is changing hue." Moreover, by his use of hebdomads, he declares that humans are entitled to make their own narratives of the life course without having to appeal to the unchanging repetition of the cosmos or to other authorities: a first step toward an art of aging.

3.2. The Search for Wisdom and the Emergence of an Art of Life

In a classic scene in book 1 of the Homeric *Iliad,* Achilles turns against Agamemnon with abusive language, throwing away his weapons in anger. As Agamemnon sits sulking, a famous old man speaks words of reconciliation:

> Then among them arose Nestor, sweet of speech, the clear-voiced orator of the men of Pylos, he from whose tongue speech flowed sweeter than honey. Two

> generations of mortal men he had already seen pass away, . . . He with good intent addressed their assembly and spoke among them. . . . Then in answer to him spoke lord Agamemnon: "Old man, in all this you have surely spoken properly."

Although the relationship between old age and positive qualities like wisdom remained ambivalent, wisdom as personified in the character of old men like Nestor is a well-known image in classical Greek literature (Falkner and De Luce 1992). Moreover, choruses of old people often give advice in the tragedies, although the significance of that advice is not always clear. It was usually dismissed, which may indicate that older people's views did not matter. It may, however, also be seen as an attempt to underline the tragedy of impending fate that encounters only a blind eye and a deaf ear. Just so, the old prophet Halitherses is mocked and even threatened when he warns the suitors at the beginning of the *Odyssey* for the wrath of Odysseus, predicting in great detail how they will be punished.

Before the rise of philosophy, there appears to have been in archaic Greek culture, besides a denigration of old age, a persisting but rather conventional association between old age and wisdom, personified by traditional icons such as those portrayed by Homer, who lived in times long gone. The early Greek concept of wisdom was initially inspired by many historical sources as the Greeks had intensive contacts with other Mediterranean people such as the Egyptians. Plato tells us in his *Timaeus* (22b) about Solon's travels to Egypt, where he encountered a prodigiously old man who confronted him: "O Solon, Solon. You Greeks are always children. There is no such thing as an old Greek. . . . You are young in soul, every one of you. For therein you possess not a single belief that is ancient and derived from old tradition, not yet one science that is hoary with age." The Egyptian priest demonstrated an awareness of his being rooted in long traditions that are not only associated but also identified with deep knowledge of "old souls."

Indeed, the roots of the Western wisdom tradition reach deeply into Egyptian and Babylonian history (Assmann 1991). The oldest Egyptian wisdom teachings, such as those by Kagemni, date from the Third Dynasty of the Old Empire (28th century BC). Almost a thousand years later, in the days of the urbane court cultures of the Pharaohs Sesostris III (19th century BC) and Hammurabi (18th century BC), there was already a strictly upheld tradition that recorded maxims on walls and clay tablets. More than another millennium later, representatives of this wisdom tradition met with Solon.

We are used to translating the Greek word *philosophia* as "the love of wisdom." Originally, however, *sophia* referred to all kinds of knowledge, education, or expertise. Solon could therefore be regarded as one of the Seven Sages, although he was a politician and not a "philosopher," defined by Pythagoras (582–507 BC) as somebody who is not interested in glory or richness but who desires to know the truth. Such a desire might produce some respect, but the activities that were really thought to be honorable for free men were politics and war, whereas education was mostly seen as a luxury. Therefore, when Pericles (495–429 BC) emphasized in an important speech that the Athenians were striving for wisdom, he added that this did not mean that they would be weak (Thucydides 2001). The aristocratic reverence for fierceness in wars and battles tended to degrade the respect for any weakness, including "the weakness of old age." This did not really work in favor of the philosophers, who were often strongly disliked and even banned or killed by the power elite because they tended to question highly held ideas or important legitimizations.

The classic example of such a polemic thinker, centuries after Homer and Solon, was Socrates (469–399 BC), who initiated challenging discussions in the streets of Athens about what "wisdom" might be when confronted with practical issues. As a result, the connection between wisdom and old age became less conventional and more dependent on rational arguments. Gradually, Socrates was seen as someone who personified "wisdom," and he still inspires contemporary philosophers as they read the dialogues that were transmitted by his student Plato (427–347 BC). Socrates was famous for his wisdom although he denied that he was wise. In response to the message of the Delphic oracle that no one would be wiser than Socrates, he stated that he knew for sure that he was not wise even in the smallest degree. This has often been interpreted to mean that Socrates knew that he knew nothing, but this is beside the point. He merely emphasized that he did not *think* he knew what he did not know (Plato, *Apology* 21b 4–5, d7*)*. Consequentially, he avoided the self-defying position that is often ascribed to him "to know that he didn't know." His polemical activities in Plato's dialogues aimed at uncovering the ignorance of his opponents concerning what they pretended to know; that is, they were unable to make a distinction between what they knew and what they did not know.

But Socrates was especially skeptical about pretensions to be wise. According to him, a philosopher is striving for answers and seeks to attain wisdom; therefore, he opposes those who claim to be wise and to have all the answers

(Plato, *Protagoras* 342a–343c; *Euthydemos* 271c–272a). This skeptical attitude made Socrates many enemies, and they were powerful enough to have him executed. His followers were deeply impressed by the peaceful and determined way Socrates died. As he quietly took the deadly poison, he comforted the others around him—because nobody knows what death might be, there was no reason to fear it. He did not pretend to know what he didn't know.

In this skeptical fashion, philosophy was characterized by a "wisdom" it did not possess but tried to achieve, and the philosopher had to devote himself to this quest with all he was capable of in order to attain a glimpse of this wisdom. The philosopher is neither wise nor unwise, but *aspires* to attain wisdom and to determine what this might be (Plato, *Phaedros* 278d4; *Symposion* 204a). The main goal of Socrates was not to teach "the truth" but to encourage philosophical thinking, and in that way he could inspire a heterogeneous group of followers, logically oriented thinkers such as Eubulides or the spiritually oriented slave Phaidon, who later became a free man with the help of Socrates. But he also inspired Cynics like Diogenes of Sinope, who despised material goods, lived in a barrel, and aroused much thought and debate, not by discussing with others, but through his way of living.

In order to give this philosophical quest a minimal degree of direction or orientation, there had to be, of course, some implicitly guiding idea of what wisdom might be or what it would not be. The systematically oriented Plato was aware of such questions and went much further than Socrates in articulating a fundamental wisdom in his theory of the "Ideas." In this sense he was a more dogmatic philosopher than his teacher, and it is therefore understandable that Plato took philosophy off the streets. He founded a school where his philosophy would be taught: the famous "Academy," which lasted almost a millennium until it was closed down in AD 529 by the Roman emperor Justinian. At that time the emperor also terminated the activities of the other philosophical schools that were founded by major philosophers who were in different ways inspired by the life and work of Socrates.

The French philosophers Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot have done much in recent years to show how the different teachings of Greek philosophy in these schools were connected with ways of life (Foucault 1988; 1990; Hadot 1995; 2002; Nehamas 1998). For centuries the study of philosophy was connected with practically oriented exercises—including rhetorical instruction—to enable the students to serve in public office or to help them free themselves from fear and strive for happy fulfillment. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Ly-

ceum remained, however, more theoretically oriented than the Epicurean and Stoic schools, which were established around 300 BC. I shall briefly discuss these schools and their ideas regarding wisdom and the art of living, including how they looked at aging.

Plato's Academy

In Plato's Academy one of the main tasks of the student was to learn to take care of oneself (*epimeleia eauton*) because this would also be necessary to lead others (Plato, *Apology* 36c). A classical text to educate the students was Plato's interpretation of Socrates' confronting dialogue with the young Alcibiades, who thought he could be a political leader without having developed his own soul (Plato, *Alcibiades* I.129a). Being able to care for oneself and the *polis,* or community, also required the competence to speak up in public and be able to counter the manipulative strategies that were employed by the "sophists," who represented—according to Plato—a kind of spin doctor *avant la lettre,* teaching manipulative rhetorical techniques without caring for the truth. The dialogues of Socrates with the sophists *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* were used to instruct the students of the Academy to see through such "sophisms." Another important aim of this education was learning to detach from the body. The philosophical quest was defined as an exercise in dying: learning to rejoice in one's death and to again be part of immortality (Plato, *Phaidon* 64a, 67e; *Timaeus* 89c). According to Plato's teachings, man's divine soul had fallen from the heavens and would remain in custody as long as he lived. But through a philosophical *anamnesis* (remembrance) of the eternal ideas, the soul could reconnect, albeit superficially, with the eternal realm of Beauty and Goodness until in death it would be lifted to wing off to its supreme origin (Plato, *Phaedrus* 248c; *Phaedo* 62b, 82e; *Symposium* 206a, 211c). The philosophical "care of oneself" did not include a confrontation with the vulnerability of human life or with the fragility of old age, but only with its potential for transcendence. This is one of the reasons that Martha Nussbaum speaks of Plato's "Goodness without fragility" (2001, 85).

The search for wisdom, Plato believed, should begin as soon as young people were mature enough to begin to understand philosophy. He gives the example of the 20-year-old Socrates debating with Parmenides, already "very old, with white hair but of honorable appearance, probably sixty-five years old," who warned Socrates not to listen to the opinions of the people around him because of his youth (Plato, *Parmenides* 127b-c; 130e). It was assumed that

somebody who did not acquire the self-reflective qualities of a philosopher at an early age would not grow any wiser by living long. On the contrary, in the dialogue with Alcibiades Socrates admonished this handsome youth to start taking care of himself and to acquire practical wisdom and self-knowledge while he was still young: "But you must take heart. For had you perceived your plight at fifty; it would be hard for you to take pains with yourself; whereas here you are at the time of life when one ought to perceive it" (Plato, *Alcibiades* I.127e). Socrates warned young people that they should persist and not become like those "just out of boyhood, who in the interval before they engage in business and money-making approach the most difficult part of it (philosophy), and then drop it." When they take a renewed interest in philosophy as they approach old age, their light will most probably be quenched again and never rekindled (Plato, *Laws* 498a-b).

On the one hand, "old age" was seen as a phase of life that offered—to the prosperous citizens, one might add—ideal conditions to come to a deeper philosophical understanding, since the citizens who were past the age of political and military service "should be given free range of the pasture and do nothing but philosophize" (Plato, *Republic* 498 b-c). On the other hand, there was a conditional not a direct relationship between old age and wisdom: in Plato's "Republic" the leaders were not considered wise because they were old, as in some traditionally oriented societies, but because they had studied rigorously and thought deeply all their lives. In Plato's ideal state, only the ones who were selected as the best in Platonic dialectics would be able to lead others. However, because these tasks required experience and maturity, the philosophers would only be mature enough to become leaders when they were 50 years old. From that age on, they would be able to see "that which sheds light on all . . . , the good itself" and use this to guide "the state, the citizens, and themselves throughout the remainder of their lives." Remarkably, women would have the same rights as men, but Plato usually speaks of old men, who should act as counselors because of their eminent wisdom in many matters of importance (Plato, *Republic* VII.540a; *Laws* XII.965a).

The ones who would be able to lead others in singing and music would have to be even older: "[T]he sixty-year-old singers of hymns to Dionysus ought to be exceptionally keen of perception regarding rhythms and harmonic compositions" that would be important to educate the young because they are "by nature fiery, unable to keep still either body or voice, but are always crying and leaping in disorderly fashion" (Plato, *Laws* VII.812c; II.664e).

Therefore, drinking wine should be forbidden under the age of 18 and should be permitted only in moderation to 30-year-olds. But from 40 years on, the elders "may join in convivial gatherings and invoke Dionysus," drinking the wine he bestowed on mankind as a medicine against the crabbedness of old age so that they might renew their youth (Plato, *Laws* II.666b). But the primary concern remains educating the young so that they will be able to assume their responsibilities in the future: "Since we are in the evening of life, while those compared to us are youthful, we should not only legislate, as we say, ourselves, but also make legislators, as well as Law-wardens, of these very same men, so far as we can" (Plato, *Laws* VI.770a).

The relation between philosophy and old age is intensely debated in some discussions, for example, in *Phaedrus* and *Symposium,* where the aged Socrates is confronted with a depreciation of old age. These discussions begin with the introduction of "love," which is presented as opposed to "old age," sometimes in extreme wording: "Love . . . by his nature hates old age" (Plato, *Symposium* 195b). In his response, Socrates introduces himself as an old man and reminds the participants in the Symposium that he also needed education when he was young. He recalls that—quite surprisingly in the patriarchal culture of ancient Greece—he was educated by a woman, the wise Diotima, who taught him that human life was profoundly characterized by *change*. Her ideas remind us of the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus but are explained in astonishingly modern terms in which we can recognize contemporary biological perspectives as well as the question of the continuity and discontinuity of personal identity: "Someone is said to be the same person from when he is a child until he comes to be an old man, and yet, if he's called the same, that's despite the fact that he's never made up from the same things, but is always being renewed, and losing what he had before, whether it's hair, or flesh, or bones, or blood, in fact the whole body" (Plato, *Symposium* 207d). Socrates reminds his listeners that the caricatured "old age" is a distorted anticipation of their own future, unless they would die before becoming old. But his main point is that bodily change remains a change on the same ontological level and is always "more of the same." In other words, everything changes, but nothing much happens; mortal life remains fundamentally the same process of breaking down and building up in which what becomes new will be old the next moment. To understand this, one has to live longer than young people, who tend to idealize what is new or is presented as new. This experience appears to be a precondition of arriving at a philosophical understanding of mortal life,

which might then—according to the Platonic interpretation—lead to a desire to understand everlasting truths and ideas, beyond the mortal world.

In this way, love in the sense of sexual desire is transformed by Socrates into a quest that is inspired but also limited by its mortal condition since it desires to reach beyond this condition toward "everlasting loveliness." The sensual love of beautiful bodily forms is transformed into a love of beauty and lasting ideas, so that the old lover becomes a lover of wisdom and of young people who aspire to become philosophers. To Socrates, growing older means a growing ability to transcend desire and to devote oneself to philosophy.

Attaining a higher age does not by itself give one more insight, but it takes "a long life" to perceive the limitations and illusions of mortal life, arriving gradually at a more profound understanding. Old age and philosophy are brought together because philosophy requires such a longtime devotion that a good or mature philosopher will be relatively old. But even a long life devoted to philosophy may not be enough: "For wisdom and assured true conviction, a man is fortunate if he acquires them even on the verge of old age" (Plato, *Laws* 653a).

However, Plato underlines the special quality of a reflection on "what the poets call the 'threshold' of old age" (Plato, *Republic* 328e), looking back on one's life in anticipation of one's soon death. Although even somebody close to death might be tempted to embellish his past and make it more virtuous than it actually deserves, this position also offers the opportunity to transcend the immediate concerns of life and one's personal desires, gaining a perspective of insight and overview that was not as likely to occur earlier in life. This reflection on the threshold, looking backward and forward, can lead to a different quality of self-reflection in which it may become clear, for instance, that I should have done something differently, with less harmful results or just more harmoniously. This reflection anticipates what we have come to know as a "life review" (Butler 1963; McKee 2008), but it might also gain a much broader and deeper meaning as it extends to issues beyond one's more personal concerns. Plato elaborates on impressive examples such as Socrates' defense in front of the judges who sentenced him to death. Besides these reflections on Socrates' activities and intentions in the *Apology,* we can find also in Plato's dialogue *Crito* a discussion of Socrates about the question of whether his nearing death would change his view of the life he had tried to lead. And in *Phaidoon,* Plato's reflective narrative of Socrates' death, we are once more confronted with Socrates' "life review." Obviously, reflecting about the life one has led in the

face of a near and certain death had a special value for Plato, and he made sure that these reflections would not be lost because they had something important to say about life and how to live it. He praises the honesty of Socrates as he faces death and cannot expect to gain from "embroidering his words like a young man would do" (Plato, *Apology* 17c).

In many religions the possibility of this perspective "on the threshold" has been seen in terms of a final verdict that would lead to eternal punishment or reward. But it has also been seen as a privileged perspective of concerned but impartial insight, and as such it has played a major role in ascertaining respect for old age. Of course, a higher age was never seen as a guarantee that somebody had acquired this perspective, but only that aging would offer special opportunities to learn some important lessons and to develop an understanding that might also be valuable for younger people. That it should instead be a phase of deficit and playing checkers is the other extreme—as if being young would be the equivalent of wisdom and knowing how life "works."

This ambivalence, that a long life can offer opportunities to become "wise" but that wisdom is also a matter of discussion and clarification so that a higher age or a lower age cannot replace arguments, is shown in a famous episode of the first book of Plato's *Republic,* where Socrates meets Cephalus, who is introduced as an old man. Socrates starts the conversation by saying that he likes talking with Cephalus, since he is well advanced in years and might give an answer to the question of whether old age is a burden. After all, Cephalus has already made his way to it and can tell about it. Cephalus stresses that old age as such is not the cause of the many problems older people are complaining about. He is not going to join all those men who complain about getting older while boasting at the same time about their former sexual performance. In contrast to Mimnermus's lament, Cephalus recollects how Sophocles appreciated the liberation old age brings from the tyranny of sexual desire and emphasizes that his "desire for the pleasures of good talk and my delight in them increase. . . . For in very truth there comes in old age a great tranquility in these matters and a blessed release." Although it may help that Cephalus is rich, the real comfort is to have led "a life of justice" so that he does not have to fear the gods: "For if men are temperate and cheerful, even old age is only moderately burdensome, but if men are the reverse, not only old age but even youth will be hard for them" (Plato, *Republic* 328d–329d).

Socrates honors Cephalus because he sees him as being on the "threshold of old age" and acknowledges that he can learn from him, but this brief en-

counter does not lead to a further discussion, and Cephalus ceases to play a further role. He is not presented as somebody who was able to say something profound about justice, which is one of the fundamental issues that is raised after Socrates' confrontation with old age in the person of Cephalus. In other words, the most essential issues have nothing to do with age; they are "eternal." And although it may take a long life of dedication to understand them, old age does not in itself grant wisdom.

Aristotle's Lyceum

> Call no man happy until he is dead. SOPHOCLES (496–406 BC), *OEDIPUS REX*

In the Lyceum of Plato's former student Aristotle (384–322 BC), the education was less spiritually oriented. He especially admired Socrates' clear distinctions and sharp interrogations and was much more interested than Plato in the basic principles that could be found in the empirical world around him. His work extended from logic to metaphysics, poetics, rhetoric, physics, ethics, and politics. The students in the Aristotelian Lyceum were confronted with a most interesting work, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE),* based on his lectures—a work that still exercises a major influence today. The students were educated in a loving attention for themselves (*philautia*), although friendship and public responsibilities were valued highly. Through exercise and practice, virtues of thought and moral values were acquired that would form admirable characters. An important guideline was to look for the harmonious middle, or "golden mean": *bravery,* for instance, could be found in avoiding both cowardice and recklessness; *generosity,* the well-balanced middle between avarice and wasteful behavior.

> I am talking here about virtue of character, since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and it is in these that we find excess, deficiency, and the mean. For example, fear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced too much or too little, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue." (*NE* 1106b; cf. 1104a, 1109a)

But this was just one important guideline among others, since the search for a harmonious middle did not apply in all ethical matters; murder or adultery, for instance, were considered to be always wrong. The aim of living, according

to Aristotle's ethics, would be a blooming life: virtuous happiness or flourishing (*eudaimonia*). In his plea for an active, virtuous life, Aristotle opposed Plato's view that moral goodness could not be harmed or affected by external circumstances (Plato, *Apology* 41d). In *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001), Martha Nussbaum argues that Aristotle had an open eye for the contingency of life as he acknowledged that a fundamental vulnerability was an inevitable aspect of the human condition. The exemplary meaning of virtuous wisdom (*phronesis*) would be demonstrated in the way the wise man meets these challenges.

Interestingly, Aristotle places his virtue ethics in the context of the human life course. He emphasizes that children cannot be happy, since they are not yet capable of noble actions, but that even adults, who are capable of such actions should not be called "happy," because "happiness requires complete virtue and a complete life" (*NE* 1100a). There are many vicissitudes in life, and especially in old age there is increasing risk that one will meet much misery; even the most successful or prosperous "can meet with great misfortunes in old age" (*NE* 1100a).

Aristotle refers to a famous story recorded by Herodotus about Solon's meeting with the extraordinarily rich king Croesus. After having been shown all the riches, Solon still refused to call Croesus "happy" because the end of his life was still unknown and might be bad. The point Aristotle wants to make is not only that life is contingent and vulnerable but also that virtuous happiness and flourishing of a person cannot be realized in isolated actions, that life as a *whole* has to succeed: "This must be over a complete life. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day. Neither does one day or a short time make somebody blessed and happy" (*NE* 1098a.19).

This raises the question of whether Aristotle's emphasis on the *end* of life in evaluating somebody's happiness, which is probably the result of the teleological structure of his thought, does not lead to a narrowing of his virtue ethics to the retrospective evaluation of human lives instead of clarifying how human virtue, happiness, and flourishing can succeed in everyday actions.

At the end of his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle turns away from practical concerns toward a more contemplative perspective, emphasizing that such a life would be the best for human beings. One would expect that old age would be mentioned here, just as in Plato's work, as a phase of contemplation, but this is not the case. On the contrary, Aristotle's general opinion about "old people" is quite negative; he regards them as "ill-tempered" and "sour" people with whom friendship is hardly possible (*NE* 1157; 1158a). They are not able

to hold the golden mean of generosity between wastefulness and stinginess: "Stinginess, however, is both incurable (it seems to be caused by old age and every sort of disability), and more a part of human nature than wastefulness" (*NE* 1121b). Apparently, in old age persons seem to be unable to carry the load of virtue any further, and they tend to sink back into their uncivilized natural substrate.

Aristotle tends to the view that older people need not be taken seriously. In his *On Rhetoric* he unfolds his strategy for addressing them effectively, because in certain situations, for political reasons, for example, it can still be important to have their consent. The speaker is advised to take advantage of their negative characteristics and not to appeal to their capacities of understanding or to the responsibility they might feel for the common good. In *On Rhetoric* Aristotle picks up the thread of a remark by Socrates in *Phaedrus* that true speaking implies knowing the soul of the person addressed. Such knowledge is part of the art of rhetoric. In comparison to Socrates' dialogical search for truth, Aristotle proceeds in a more pragmatic and strategic way. He begins with discussing the characteristics of young people and then gives the profile of the old, since they are supposed to be the opposite of the young. And in the supposedly harmonious Aristotelian middle, we find the character of those in the prime of life. According to Aristotle this most vigorous stage of life is between the ages of 30 and 36 as far as the body is concerned, while for the mind the summit would be around the age of 49. With some irony, we can observe that according to some commentaries Aristotle was 49 years old when he wrote this text.

The major characteristics that Aristotle attributes to the old are the following:

- The old are the opposite of the young. This is the underlying antithesis.
- The young are sure to have a knowledge of everything; they are optimists, unsuspecting and brazen. Since the old have often experienced that they pitched their expectations too high, they are hesitant, cynical, and suspicious.
- Whereas young people's love and hatred are too intense, the emotions of old people have grown flat. They hate something as if they will love it the next day, and they love something as if they will hate it the next day.
- Young people's expectations of the future run high, and they are least

interested in money. On the other hand, old people no longer expect great things to happen and are bent on satisfying their daily needs. They are stingy, since they know that money is hard to gain but easy to lose.

- The old are cowardly and frightened of anything. They always expect things to come to a bad end, whereas the young are courageous because they see no danger.
- The old can no longer be persuaded to take an interest in important matters. They are ego-centric, pleased with themselves, and have hardly any sense of shame.
- The old are attached to life because they long for what they lack.
- The old live in memories and are talkative about the past.
- They are bent on their own interests and calculating. When they do wrong, it is out of malice not ignorance.
- The pity of old people is not compassion; it is a feeling arising from weakness. There is sympathy because they assume that disaster may also hit them.
- Older people do not laugh much; they are not funny or witty but quarrelsome. (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric II,* 13)

Aristotle advises whoever addresses "old people" to bear these characteristics in mind. It is likely that he reproduced contemporary prejudices about the elderly such as can be found in Aristophanes' *The Wasps* and in the comedies of Aristotle's contemporary Menander (Falkner and De Luce 1989). Moreover, the composition of the chapters about the "characters" of the young, the old, and those in the prime of life suggests that Aristotle first created two extremes (the young and the old) in order to be able to present those in the prime of life as the "golden mean."

Sometimes his critique of old people is mixed up with other concerns, such as the lack of virtue of leaders in lifelong positions of unaccountable power that he saw in the *Gerousia* of Sparta: "It may be said that elders are good men and well trained in manly virtue; and that, therefore, there is an advantage to the state in having them. But that judges of important causes should hold office for life is a disputable thing, for the mind grows old as well as the body. And when men have been educated in such a manner that even the legislator cannot trust them, there is real danger. Many of the elders are well known to have taken bribes and to have been guilty of partiality in public affairs. And

therefore they ought not to be non-accountable; yet in Sparta they are so" (Aristotle, *Politics,* 1270b–1271a).

There are, however, some isolated remarks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* indicating that older persons should be respected: "To any older person, as well, we should render the honour appropriate to his age, by standing up, giving up our seat and so on." Especially the parents should be supported and be rendered honor, but in a moderate way, by no means "the honour due to a wise person or a general" (*NE* 1155a; 1165a). Besides such rather superficial respect, we find the advice "to attend to the undemonstrated words and beliefs of experienced and older people or of practically wise people, no less than their demonstrations, because their experienced eye enables them to see correctly" (*NE* 1143b). However, negatively colored generalizations about "the old" can be found consistently across Aristotle's work (Small 2007). Old age appears here as a state of physical, cognitive, and emotional deterioration that envelopes and pervades the whole person so that all morally relevant capacities also fail.

Looking back at Aristotle's harsh words, we can doubt whether human senescing must be seen as a linear negative development that sets in after somebody has left the age-related "prime of life." Even if "the old" become totally enveloped in a deterioration of all human capabilities, there will still be the moral question of why they should not deserve respect from "normal" adults, since Aristotle emphasizes that "the old" cannot be held responsible for their suffering. Humans cannot decide to stay young: "[T]here are plenty of things in the course of nature that we do and suffer knowingly, and which have nothing voluntary or involuntary about them, such as growing old or dying" (*NE* 1135b.1). Because suicide remains forbidden, the only remaining hope seems to be to die before old age strikes (*NE* 1138a.5–14; 1116a.15).

Generally, Aristotle's virtue ethics appears to acknowledge the vulnerability of life as something that constitutes the virtuous condition, not as "something hard and invulnerable" but as a "yielding and open posture towards the world" (Nussbaum 2001, 340f.). Through such an approach we can appreciate that certain human virtues are especially valuable in confrontation with a world of uncertainty and material deprivation. It is understandable that Aristotle is not inclined to call somebody "completely" happy as long as life remains vulnerable and one cannot know what the future may have in store. Moreover, the vulnerability of human life increases eventually to fragility and death. We may develop dementia, which will have consequences for our

moral capacities because we may no longer be able to understand and evaluate situations of any complexity. But even "dementia" is a generalizing label that hides the complexity of many different personalities and situations. Moreover, dementia is not the only *Gestalt* of old age. Many people may live healthily for a long time during their old age; even if they develop a chronic disease, this does not imply that they are transformed into other beings—creatures of "old age." Why should we want to come to a verdict over whether somebody's life was happy *as a whole?* If vulnerability is inevitable, how can "a complete life" be "completely happy"? How can happiness exclude that there is also unhappiness? Is Aristotle's virtue ethics only concerned with "manly virtues" of those in the so-called prime of life? Is it not possible to live well while aging?

In *Goods and Virtues,* Michael Slote (1983) has addressed some of the problems that arise for Aristotelian virtue ethics as a result of his negative ideas about the vulnerable end of life that would be decisive in establishing whether someone's life can be called happy. According to Slote, to invest what happens late in life "with greater significance and weight in determining the goodness of lives" fails to acknowledge that we should expect less of old age. We should therefore be more tolerant when people are spending their last years "concentrating on winning senior citizen shuffleboard tournaments" and not continue to judge them according to criteria that were appropriate in the prime of life, which contains the "goals, strivings, miseries, and satisfactions that are to be taken most seriously." The declining capacities that, according to Slote, are typical of old age should be met by more modest expectations and should also be accepted by the persons who inhabit that stage of life: "There is thus something ironic about very old people who are still actively engaged in careers, for their undiminished powers seem to mock the second-order ability of those powers long to sustain themselves—compare the pseudo-rejuvenation of those about to die of starvation" (1983, 34).

On the one hand, Slote tries to correct Aristotle's teleological construct, which overemphasizes the end of life when making a final statement about the quality of human lives, as he acknowledges that senescing may lead to a deterioration of health and cognitive functions without jumping to the conclusion that life as a whole has been unhappy. On the other hand, he continues Aristotle's prejudice about old age as he assumes that such deterioration is typical for older persons. Helen Small notes in her interesting work *The Long Life* that Slote runs the risk of becoming prejudicial, given his "unmarked shifts between the vocabulary of age and the vocabulary of senility" (2007,

103). But even she tends to agree with Aristotle's description of "the old" in *On Rhetoric:* "As a broad characterization of the behaviour and cast of mind of those past their mental and physical prime, much of what he says rings true" (2007, 66).

The Garden *of Epicurus*

The *Garden* was the philosophical school of Epicurus (341–270 BC), who wrote numerous books that were destroyed by Christians, who considered his work sinful and dangerous. What remains are some theses and letters and an instructive account of his life and work by Diogenes Laertius (1950; Long and Sedley 1989). In Epicurus's school the philosophical education lost much of its political and social content, although there was still an emphasis on the importance of friendship. In this school the care of oneself aimed at individual pleasure or lust (*hedone*), and consequently there was little attention for the theoretical, spiritual, or ethical ideas that were taught in the Platonic Academy and the Aristotelian Lyceum. The Epicurean school was remarkably open: not only were women and children, who were not regarded as citizens in the Greek polis, admitted to the lessons, but even a slave, whom Aristotle regarded as an "animated tool," was admitted.

Epicurus taught that in pain and lust we learn who we are by measure of our bodies. The body, however, only teaches us the difference between pain and pleasure; the problem is that it always wants more pleasure. Therefore, it needs the guidance of the soul to avoid addiction and to understand how to best satisfy our needs so that our pleasures will become richer in the sense of more variation and nuances, not in the "fast food sense" of more of the same. An important exercise was to learn to enjoy the present, the here and now, since the pleasures of the past are not anymore and those of the future are not yet real (Hadot 2009). The Christians who feared his work because it would propagate carnal lust made a caricature of Epicurus's philosophy. Actually, he encouraged leading a *sober, ascetic life,* avoiding public attention or honor. It is understandable that a contemporary hedonist like Michel Onfray (1994) regards Epicurus as a masochist rather than hedonist—as somebody who would "sit naked in the sun to meditate, like a candle on a stone, waiting to melt in his own sweat" (quoted in Dohmen 2007).

The hedonistic goal of the Epicurean philosophy of life is not the restless consumption that characterizes much of present life in the rich countries but a rather ascetic striving for a steady quietness and peace of the soul (*ataraxia*).

Epicurus taught that it would be nonsensical to fear the gods, for they are too happy to bother with anything that might be happening in the world—and anyway, his *Physics* taught, the world is just an accidental formation of atoms. Also, to fear death makes no sense, because when we are alive, death is absent, and when death has come, we are not there anymore to notice it. Here again, thinking about death did not lead to thinking about old age, although Epicurus emphasized in his "Letter to Menoeceus" that his philosophical way of life would be valuable for people of all ages: "No one is under-age or over-age for health of the soul. To say either that the time is not yet ripe for philosophizing, or that the time for philosophizing has gone by, is like saying that the time for happiness either has not arrived or is no more" (Long and Sedley 1989, 1:154).

According to Cicero, who knew Epicurean texts that have been lost to us, Epicurus maintained that a longer life would add nothing to the quality of a life: "No less pleasure is experienced in a short period of time than if it were everlasting" (2001, 55). In contrast to Aristotle, the Epicurean view of happiness does not depend on the happiness of one's further life: a fulfilled life does not depend on its *duration*. Therefore, even what others might consider as a premature death should not be feared; the only life that counts is here and now.

The Stoics

In the philosophical school of the *Stoics,* named after its colorful colonnade (*stoa poikile*) and founded by Zeno (333–262 BC), there was a strong emphasis on the practical meaning of philosophy. The Stoic philosophers preferred an active life and a strong will, both guided by practical insight (*phronesis*). An active public life was supposed to chase away most intellectual problems that troubled the students of the Academy and the Lyceum; it would clear the mind to see the universal *Logos,* which would govern and unite all beings. This last Stoic conviction was a major difference in comparison to Epicurus, who taught that the universe was just an accidental formation of atoms without any inherent meaning. The Stoic activism was supported by a repression of emotions and passions that would be the result of wrong ideas and would threaten the independence, quietness, and peace of the soul. The Stoics were not looking for the Aristotelian middle in dealing with their feelings but were determined not to be influenced by them.

Paradoxically, these seemingly self-determining activists believed in a uni-

versal reason (*Logos*) that would determine everything that happened. The subsequent generations of Stoic philosophers have struggled with this tension between freedom and determination, and their adversaries did not tire of pointing out that they contradicted themselves. One solution was to suggest that the wise man could not want something other than what was determined to happen anyway. As Seneca writes in one of his letters: "[T]here is nothing the wise man does reluctantly. He escapes necessity because he wills what necessity is going to force on him" (Seneca 1982, Letter LIV, p. 105). Thus, for him there would be no problem; however, the ignorant fool who is led by his emotions would suffer and complain about what happened to him. Because of such highly strung pretensions, the Stoic sage has been critically portrayed as somebody "who never errs, never fails to grasp things with complete security. His knowledge is logically equivalent to truth, since it is based upon the causal nexus which controls cosmic events . . . the wise man's judgments are infallible, since he knows why each of them must be true" (Long 1986, 130).

For the students in the Stoic schools, these theoretical paradoxes or contradictions were not very troubling. They learned to achieve calmness and a trust in nature where everything would work according to a higher reason and where whatever happened in this well-ordered cosmos should just be harmoniously accepted. To understand and learn to accept the universal order was essential for the Stoics, for failing to do so caused people to feel miserable; they become unhappy because they want something to happen that is other than what is harmonious on a grand scale. In other words, unhappy people want the impossible and overestimate what they can do.

For the Stoic philosophers "physics" was not, in a modern sense, aiming at a methodical explanation of natural phenomena. It was a philosophy of nature that was concerned with assuaging the fear of natural phenomena that could only be caused by not understanding their universal and divine order. This did not exclude explanation by methodical observation; their great example of how the understanding of natural phenomena could take away fear was the prediction of the eclipse of the sun in 585 BC, centuries before Stoicism, by one of the Seven Sages. The pre-Socratic philosopher Thales of Milete impressed his fellow citizens by predicting a sudden darkness but told them not to panic because this could be explained by the temporary location of the moon between the earth and the sun.

The development of Stoic philosophy took place in three major phases. After the Old Stoic school, founded in Athens around 300 BC, came the Mid-

dle Stoic school led by Panaitios and Poseidonius in the second and first centuries BC. They took especially great interest in physics. The New Stoic school flourished in Rome (see 3.3.) with influential philosophers such as Seneca (4 BC–AD 65), the former slave Epictetus (50–138) and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180). It focused almost entirely on practical moral philosophy and developed a unique cosmopolitan orientation grounded in the idea that the universe is divine and that there is a divine spark in every man. It was thus possible for a slave like Epictetus to become a leading authority and a major influence on the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Finally, the *Skeptics* should be mentioned. Although they did not so much form a school, there was an ongoing skeptical undercurrent in Greek philosophy that had a major impact on Cicero. *Philo of Larissa* (159–83 BC), one of the leaders during the Skeptical phase of the Platonian Academy, was especially critical of the Epicurean and Stoic pretensions to be able to acquire immutable wisdom. When Philo fled to Rome in 87 BC, his epistemological arguments made a huge impression in Rome and certainly on Cicero, who wrote *On Academic Scepticism* (2006), which is still the main source of knowledge about this form of skepticism. Philo also had a major influence on rhetoric, as we can learn from Cicero's *On the Orator* (1942; 1948). As a result of this skeptical influence, Cicero tended to regard dogmas as mere opinions and allowed himself to be an eclectic: to choose freely and with "inner peace" which argument or idea served him best in attaining his purpose.

Wisdom, Aging, and Old Age

We can see how Socrates' legacy bore fruit in many ways, inspiring the Greeks and later the Romans to examine their lives and search for a good life. The influence of these schools, especially those of Plato and Aristotle, can hardly be overestimated. Their history shows that philosophy did not originate as a purely theoretical endeavor: *theoria* was also *praxis,* a way to live. This does not mean, however, that there was not a strong tension between, on the one hand, practical interpretations and applications and, on the other hand, the more theoretical and skeptical questioning that is also inherent in philosophy as an activity that produces many new questions for each answer.

Beyond a superficial traditional image of the "old sage," wisdom and old age are not specifically linked by the Greeks. There are many admonitions to seek advice, not of old people, but of people in the vigor of their lives. Seers, priests, and wise men abound in Greek literature, and their lofty characteris-

tics can sometimes be found in old people, though more often they are not. An important reason to detach wisdom from age in the philosophical schools is that the *search* for wisdom is taken seriously, preventing the idea that a higher age by itself leads to wisdom. Moreover, the search for wisdom has to be taken up while one is still young to prevent superficial opinions and bad habits from gaining control over one's character. On the one hand, a neutral picture is sketched in which the old do not have a more direct access to truth or wisdom than others. On the other hand, however, the picture of old age is somewhat more negative insofar as aging is supposed to increasingly block the capacity of understanding unless it is led in the proper direction when a person is still young. Plato's philosophy gives the most credit to aged people, since he clearly states that it takes a lifelong experience of searching for wisdom to be able to lead others.

So the culture of the ancient Greeks was not free from negative stereotypes about old age, but these prejudices did not prevent older people from participating and flourishing. Many of the artists and philosophers that we still know about were well-respected and productive into relatively high ages. Their contributions were not valued less because they were made by older people. Aeschylus wrote his masterpiece, *Oresteia,* when he was 67; the philosopher Anaxagoras led his school until his death at 72; Euripides died when he was 80, shortly after having written his major work, *The Bacchae;* Sophocles reached the age of 90 and wrote *Oedipus at Colonus* during the last years of his life; and Plato led an active life until his death at the age of 83. In other words, negative ideas or images of old age can form a burden, but their impact must not be overstated. However, much like today, important creative contributions of older people did not lead to a reconsideration of negative prejudice: outstanding achievements of older people were seen as exceptions that proved the rule.

Here, we need to look more carefully at what old age probably meant to the people living in antiquity. To begin with, the prospect of becoming old was likely about becoming dependent, since there were scarcely any means to compensate for handicaps or to cure health problems that may seem of minor importance to us. The first primitive reading glasses were made in Venice in the thirteenth century, so the most advanced help that the aged Seneca managed to get to read manuscripts was a glass bowl filled with water. We must therefore be careful not to interpret the Greek and Roman images of old age in chronometric terms: generally, when there are no age-related pensions, old

age does not depend on calendar age but refers to a functional state of chronic illness and dependency. Even though we often find in Greek texts that "old age" begins around 60 years of age, this is usually just a general expectation that at that age people can no longer take care of themselves. However, as long as somebody was still able and active, he might be regarded as relatively old, but "old age" had not yet struck. A clear example of this way of thinking is a passage in Xenophon's *Apology,* where he has Socrates say that it was not in his interest to survive because he was thus spared from "old age, on which all troubles, all privations of comfort, concur to fall . . . the most burdensome part of life" (Xenophon 1923). Socrates, however, was already 70 when he was sentenced to death, so if chronometric age defined old age, he would have entered it long before his death.

3.3. Cicero and the Stoic Art of Living in Old Age

With the New Stoic school we have already entered the Roman world. Based on what was handed down to us—laws, letters, epitaphs, speeches, satires—our knowledge of their everyday lives is much more differentiated. However, until the end of the twentieth century, historians had hardly published anything about old age in the Roman world. Changing concerns in the present have led to changes in its history, however. Some excellent studies and overviews were published at the beginning of the twenty-first century, such as Katherine Cokayne's *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (2003) and Tim Parkin's *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (2004).

There were several cultural constructions of the life course. One of them, as we saw in Solon's poem, was based on hebdomads, and it was thought that maturity (*iuvenis*) came at about 35 and old age (*senex*) at the age of 49 (De Luce 1993b). This earlier onset of old age seems to be more in keeping with the lower life expectancy than was the case in the Greek categorization of the life course. The life course of a Roman woman was again determined by her capacity of giving birth. She was mature from the age of 14 until the menopause, after which she was considered "old." According to reconstructions, the Roman life expectancy at birth was around twenty-five years, and the average age at death of adult women was 34 and of adult men 46 years of age. Because of bad hygienic conditions and poor health care, childbearing and childhood were extremely risky, and accidents, wars, and contagious diseases

also took their toll (Saller 1994; Scarborough 1969). For the Greeks, life expectancy can hardly have been much higher.

The greater part of Roman literature continued the ambivalent image of old age that the Greeks had, although the Romans may have been somewhat subtler (Roberts 1989; De Luce 1993b). When Horace in his *Epistola* distinguishes the nature of the stages of life in terms of the "seasons" that typify them, he is rather balanced as far as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are concerned, but one-sidedly negative when discussing old age. He depicts old men as miserly, afraid to live and even more afraid to die, cold-hearted, slow, intolerant, irascible, embittered, and preoccupied with what it was like in the old days. During some period in Roman history, 60-year-old men were no longer allowed to cast their votes in the *Saepta Iulia,* a building where adult men would decide on public matters; therefore, they were no longer allowed to enter the building and were held back at the bridge that led to the entrance of the *Saepta*. Hence, the Latin expression *"sexagenarios de ponte":* "[throw] 60-year-olds from the bridge," which provides another example of the ambivalent position of older men.

Need and fragility dominate the general cultural image of old age. When Aeneas enters the underworld in the *Aeneid* by Virgil (70–19 BC), he first arrives in an area where he meets old age in the company of grief, worry, illness, anxiety, hunger, poverty, and death. There is, however, ample literary evidence of the importance and autonomy of prominent older men. The *Aeneid* features several old men who are praised for their wisdom and even for their unremitting vigor. In several letters Pliny (62–113) describes old men who, even at an advanced age, continue to play major roles. However, the "common" old people featured in Plautus's comedies are usually mean, suspicious, and ignorant. Older people who continue to show sexual interest were especially the objects of derision. They clearly did not display the kind of behavior deemed fitting for their stage of life. Only rarely does literature show a positive picture of continuing mutual love such as the story of Philemon and Baucis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (De Luce 1989).

One of the sources of derision of the older man was probably his all-powerful patriarchal position within the Roman family structure (De Luce 1993a). The paterfamilias was the only person to have absolute power over his family, and he usually ruled until his death. In *On Old Age (Cato Maior de Senectute),* Cicero gives the example of an old man who, although blind, ruled

over his family with a firm hand: "For instead of inertly capitulating to old age he kept his mind as taut as a bow. He not only directed his home, he ruled it; his slaves feared him, his children venerated him, he was loved by everyone, and beneath his roof ancestral custom and discipline prevailed. Age will only be respected if it fights for itself, maintains its own rights, avoids dependence, and asserts control over its own sphere as long as life lasts" (Cicero 1960, 227).

In fact, for the greater part of their lives or even all their lives, almost everyone was subservient to family despots. And except for some famous exceptions, all women were under lifelong male authority. Respect but also mockery and other negative images concerning the old might be connected with rancor against the disproportionate amount of power held by family despots. However, within the family the principle of seniority applied, so a relatively young man could become paterfamilias, provided he was the eldest male in the family.

In any case, Roman society made ample room for the older men from its elites. Among several relatively old emperors, one of the best-known, Augustus, was emperor until his death at the age of 76. There was also the Roman council of wise old men, the Senate (derived from *senex,* old man). As in the earlier Greek world, there were occasionally laws that obliged children to take care of their parents if they were in need, which illustrates the difficulties of the situation childless people might experience. It was in this historical context that Cicero, the author of the most important Roman treatise on old age, lived.

Cicero

Marcus Tullius Cicero lived from 106 to 43 BC. He was a writer, orator, lawyer, and statesman. This latter role cost him his life, for he was killed in the skirmishes surrounding Caesar's succession. Cicero's criticism of Marc Anthony in the *Orationes Philippicae* enraged Anthony, who had him murdered on his estate near Formiae. First his hands, which had written the criticism, were chopped off, then his head; they were nailed to the rostra at the Forum as a warning to any further critics.

Cicero's work lives on, however, since he was the productive author of many summaries of Greek philosophy in Latin. His work was of major importance for the development of the Latin language. Cicero's writings extended the Romans' cultural horizon enormously. Because of his stay in Greece, where he was trained in rhetoric and philosophy, he was able to bridge the gap between the old world and the new Roman world. Cicero was not an original

thinker but an eclectic who summarized what could be learned from Greek philosophy and translated important texts for the Romans. Although he also spent some time studying with the Epicurean philosopher Phaidros, the Middle Stoic school exerted the strongest influence on him when he studied in Rhodos with the Stoic philosopher Poseidonios of Apamea. This influence can be seen in many parts of Cicero's work; for instance, *De Officiis* was mainly a Latin version of a work on duty by the Stoic philosopher Panaitios.

During the Middle Ages—in fact until the early Renaissance—scholars mostly read Latin, and it was by reading Cicero that they came to know the Greek authors. Because of this some of his works, such as *De Officiis (On Duties), Tusculanae Disputationes (Tusculan Disputations*), and *De Re Publica (On the Republic),* became very influential. These works deal mainly with ethical and political issues. The *Tusculan Disputations,* especially, became a spiritual guide of the Renaissance. Harvard's famous *Loeb Classical Library* has 29 volumes of Cicero's work in translation.

Cato Maior de Senectute: On Old Age

According to historical research, there must have been dozens of writings on old age and related subjects (Parkin 2005); however, very little of this has survived. Cicero's *Cato Maior de Senectute* (*On Old Age*) is unique in its discussion of old age and thus has captured the attention of philosophers throughout history. The medieval philosopher Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) and the Renaissance thinker Dante (1265–1321) as well as the humanist Erasmus (1469–1536) admired Cicero's text. Erasmus especially appreciated its practical meaning in contrast to the scholastic treatises he had mocked so effectively in his *Praise of Folly* (Erasmus 1988; see Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming; Burrow 1986; Sears 1986).

De Senectute is one of the many works Cicero wrote during the last years of his life, which he spent in isolation. Divorced from his wife, his much-loved daughter Tullia deceased, politically isolated, Cicero put his mind to writing again. To his friend Atticus, he writes how much he suffers from the loss of Tullia; he withdraws in his books hoping to find some distraction there. He is continually tormented by moments of grief that he tries to suppress as well as he can, "but it is an unequal fight." According to Powell (1988), who composed a meticulous edition of Cicero's work and also refers to Cicero's letters from that period, Cicero's positive views on old age do not tally with his own experiences. However, it is doubtful whether Cicero saw his own suffering as a

consequence of old age. Moreover, as we can learn from the dedication of this work to his friend Atticus, "old age" is still something of the future: "What I shall try to compose for you—as well as for myself—is a consolation for this prospect" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 213; De Luce 1993b).

De Senectute is cast in the form of the eloquent argument of a legendary Roman living a century before Cicero. This man, Cato the Elder, led a long and highly influential life until he died at the age of 85. The classical use of impressive *exempla* such as *Cato Maior* and other important Romans as convincing evidence was common in a time when modern scientific culture was not yet developed. Cato suited Cicero's purposes very well because he continued to develop himself as he grew older; he began to learn Greek, for instance, when he was 80 years old and continued to inspire many of his contemporaries and descendants. Two young men, Scipio and Laelius, who later also become famous Romans, play the role of interviewers, asking the appropriate questions to prompt Cato's eloquent speech. The marginal conversations between these three are a respectful reminder of the Socratic-Platonic tradition, and in some passages the text can be read as a repeat of the Platonic dialogue between Socrates and Cephalus discussed above.

Cicero's Defense of Old Age against Four Complaints

The argument of *De Senectute* has a familiar rhetorical structure: four "objections" to old age are formulated as being the major reasons that old age is supposed to be an unhappy phase of life, which Cicero then tries to refute.

1. Old age takes us away from active work.

This complaint is based on the fact that physical strength decreases in old age. Cicero—in the person of 84-year-old Cato—does not refute this but advises finding activities that do not require a strong body but call upon the more experienced human mind. Indeed, according to Cicero, older people are often the right persons to lead the activities of others: because of their wisdom, understanding, and authority, older people have the capacity to connect the macrocosms of the universe with the microcosms of everyday life. Their serene leadership may be compared to the position of the helmsman: "[H]e leaves others to climb the masts and run along the gangway and work the pumps, while he himself sits quietly in the stern holding the rudder. He may not be doing what the younger men are doing, but his contribution is

much more significant and valuable than theirs. Great deeds are not done by strength or speed, or physique: they are the products of thought, and character, and judgment. And far from diminishing, such qualities actually increase with age" *(On Old Age,* 1960, 220).

Besides exercising official duties, wise old men are often engaged in another worthy activity: cultivating the land. This work is alternated with giving advice to young people who come and seek guidance from the older, experienced statesman, who is still held in high esteem because of the wise decisions he made when he was still in office.

2. Old age weakens the body.

The old Cato does not deny that this happens, but he does not long for the vigor of his youth any more than he wanted the strength of a bull or an elephant when he was young. There is not much that can be missed here because activities requiring much physical strength do not rank very high. Much more important are the active care for the state and its institutions as well as for one's family, guests, and friends. Apart from all this, teaching the young may give much satisfaction, even if one's strength decreases. The Stoic view on nature, where everything happens harmoniously according to divine order, is extended to embrace old age: "Life's course is invariable—nature has one path only, and you cannot travel along it more than once. Every stage of life has its own characteristics: boys are feeble, youths in their prime are aggressive, middle-aged men are dignified, old people are mature. Each one of these qualities is ordained by Nature for harvesting in due season" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 229).

Cicero emphasizes the importance of the Stoic exercises in the art of living. His inspiring example, Cato, not only began to learn Greek in his eighties but also trained his mind by recalling meticulously each evening what he had said, heard, and done on that particular day, just as the Stoic care of oneself demanded. According to Cicero, one's mind needn't deteriorate if one continues to take an interest in human affairs and stays actively involved in them. He assures his readers that he has never heard of an old man who has forgotten where he has hidden his money. Exercise may preserve the vitality of body and especially of the mind. The deplorable elderly characters in Plautus's comedies are therefore not examples of old age as such but of "an old age that is drowsy, slothful, and inert."

3. Old age deprives us of nearly all pleasures.

The idea that one no longer derives any pleasures from life in old age is put into perspective by Cicero: plenty of important pleasures remain. Lost are the passionate sensual pleasures that threaten a man's judgment, obstruct his reasoning capacity, and blind his intelligence. Here, Cicero draws on the Stoic discipline, which emphasizes the *tranquility of the soul,* but also on the verdict, discussed earlier, that Cephalus gave in his conversation with Socrates. Cato indeed refers to the verdict on sensual lust by Archytas, one of the leading philosophers in Plato's Academy: "The most fatal curse given by nature to mankind is sensual greed. . . . Lust will drive men to every sin and crime under the sun . . . such pleasures are exceptionally repulsive and harmful. Indeed their substantial, prolonged indulgence will plunge the whole light of spirit into darkness" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 229).

In his *Tusculan Disputations,* which date from the same period as *De Senectute,* Cicero also worries about intense emotions and points to nature's wisdom, which has taken such good care of the human mind that mental well-being is within the scope of man's abilities. To achieve this, a rigorous self-control is needed, and that asks for much strength and effort, although blind and unrestrained lust may also be conquered by a natural process: if reason cannot eliminate sensual pleasure, it is a blessing, so Cicero has Cato say, that old age does this. The Stoic motive of the divine harmony in nature is applied now to old age, which shines as the harmonious culmination of the human life course instead of its decay. However, the Roman comedies, with their derision of sexually eager old people, may indicate that old age per se did not lead to the transcending of sensual pleasure.

Since the loss of physical pleasures creates opportunities for a flourishing of other qualities, old age knows other pleasures. There is a shift of emphasis in enjoying activities: the conversation during meals becomes the main source of pleasure instead of the food. Moreover, not all physical pleasure is completely gone. According to Cicero, there will always be "a natural degree of it." And "no deprivation is any trouble if you don't miss what you have lost." In other words, what one lacks cannot be judged from another phase of life. For older people, however, mental activity and its pleasures are of major importance, and they should encounter the respect that is a source of pleasure in old age. This statement by Cicero has become a classic proverb: *Apex est senectutis auctoritas* ("To be respected is the crowning glory of old age"):

> But please bear in mind, throughout this discussion, that to deserve all these compliments of mine, old age must have its foundation well laid in early life [. . .] White hairs and wrinkles cannot suddenly usurp authority, since this only comes as a final result of well-spent earlier years. (*On Old Age,* 1960, 238)

4. Death approaches.

For Cicero there is no intense conflict between old age and death; death is more of a threat to young people, since their chances to live into old age are slim. He compares dying at an early age to a big fire that can only be extinguished with a large quantity of water, whereas old people die like candles, which give out because they burn down. The dying of the very old settles their *taedium vitae* (weariness of life) in a natural way. The metaphor that illustrates the good death is the ripe fruit that falls naturally on the ground without any intervention. As in any stage of life, the pleasures that are typical for old age also come to an end.

The meaning of the length of life is also put in perspective. What counts foremost is the *finitude* of existence: no matter how long one lives, there will be an end to life. Everyone should be content with the time allotted to him and have no fear of death. The wise man has peace of mind uplifting him beyond fear and desire. In the same Stoic way Seneca, in his later treatise on the brevity of human life (*De Brevitate Vitae*), criticized those who grumble about this, for they themselves are guilty of the lack of time they experience: their grumbling is a waste of time (see 6.2).

After old age, the soul frees itself from the body it was plunged into at birth. Although the Epicurean philosophers claimed that there is no life after death, Cato calls them "insignificant." If they are right, they will not be able to claim that they had been right all along, so he takes his chances to disagree with them. Cato follows Plato in recalling the arguments concerning the immortality of the soul that Socrates advanced on the last day of his life and tries to convince his audience by pointing out that the oracle of Apollo pronounced Socrates wiser than all other mortals. The ambitious Cicero connects this classical Platonic theory of the immortality of the soul directly with immortal fame on earth.

A Statesman's View of Old Age

Cicero's essay is often regarded as representative of the Roman view of old age and respect for the old who were honored with a seat in the Senate. However,

Cicero's views can hardly be seen as representative of the current ideas of his time. Characteristic of Cicero's work, insofar as he dealt with the issues of his day, was that he polemically disagreed with prevailing views. Out of revenge, his estate was looted or confiscated more than once. He must have been irritated by the way old age was culturally constructed in his time. Even a prominent Roman like himself had to make an effort to retain some influence as he was aging, although he might still have been respected as an elder statesman had he been part of the dominant elite. However, the new political elite of the Second Triumvirate, who ascended to power in 43 BC, consisted of much younger men—one of them, Octavian, later the Emperor Augustus, was only 21 years old—and they wanted to break away from the old regime with its old senators.

Instead of *De Senectute,* or *On Old Age,* Cicero's rhetorical essay might more aptly have been called *Pro Senectute,* or *In Defense of Old Age.* He does not so much investigate old age, but he defends it with all his rhetorical powers as if it has been unjustifiably accused. His essay should be read as a passionate speech, not as a scientific report. Despite his optimism, Cicero is not unaware of the problems that may accompany old age: he wrote the treatise because of the "burden of old age" that he and his friend Titus are facing: "If not already imminent, age cannot fail to be upon us before long" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 213).

His polemical plea leads to a rather unbalanced view, which has been dismissed by some as the elite ideology of a wealthy statesman who did not want to give up his privileged position to a younger generation. There have been several rather critical responses to *De Senectute,* such as Simone de Beauvoir's irritation over Cicero's forced optimism of a male elite—although, as Helen Small observes, "she ends up sounding oddly like a Ciceronian Stoic" (Small 2007, 140).

Indeed, Cicero has in mind successful, prominent former statesmen—men like Cato and himself. His views on the mature competence and qualities of old age presuppose the cultural, political, social, and material achievements of an elite. That Cicero must have been aware of this problem to some extent is apparent in one of the few objections made by Laelius, one of Cato's younger partners in conversation: "The objection might be raised that what helps you [Cato] to find age more tolerable is your money and property and position—advantages which few others possess." Some centuries before, Socrates had put a similar question to Cephalus. Cato's answer is much the same as Cephalus's: "Even the wisest man would not find it pleasant to be old if he were very

poor, and even the richest man would not find it particularly tolerable if he were very stupid." A good old age requires living in such a way that you can continue this until your dying day, taking care of yourself and others: "There is great satisfaction in a life well spent and the memory of many things well done" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 216).

The restricted character of Cicero's thinking is apparent in a lack of criticism of the extremely hierarchical relations of his days in which slave labor, for instance, was common practice. For Cicero, working on the field is a pleasant distraction during which the mind can wander and one can ponder the potential of a seed to become a large tree, rather than the hard life of a slave who had to plod on in order to survive, most likely also on Cicero's estate. He knows slavery only as the opposite of wisdom. In his *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (*Stoic Paradoxes*), a "collection of surprising statements going against public opinion," Cicero says that whoever is virtuous lacks nothing to be happy and that only the wise man is a free man; the unwise man or the fool, on the other hand, is a dependent slave.

The Stoics showed hardly any awareness of the importance of material circumstances and of how the lack of elementary goods such as housing, food, or health could affect the dignity of the persons concerned. Such lack of critical reflection may arise when the Stoic idea of a well-ordered cosmos is projected not only on nature but also on the "second nature" of society, as if all relations between people would de facto be harmonious and just (Baars 1987). In this regard, Aristotle showed more insight into the importance of both individual development and distributive justice: "[H]appiness obviously needs the presence of external goods as well, since it is impossible, or at least no easy matter, to perform noble actions without resources"; "The happy person therefore also needs bodily goods, external goods and good fortune, so that he will not be impeded in these respects. People who claim that the person being tortured, or the person who has fallen on very bad times, is happy if he is good are, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, talking nonsense" (cf. *NE* 1131; *NE* 1099 a; *NE* 1153b). Aristotle even argued that the state would be responsible for a good life (*Politics* 1280 a, b).

Practices of extreme inequality and exploitation were not uncommon in the aristocratic culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans who aspired to be heroes like Achilles, Odysseus, Julius Caesar, or Augustus, who fought or ruled with an iron fist. This trend in these cultures tended to deprecate everybody who was not at least a "citizen": a male head of a family who ruled over the

other men in the household and over the women, children, and slaves. The work that was done in the family household, such as educating children or taking daily care of the others, including the paterfamilias, was looked down upon (Okin 1989). The virtuous life of the citizen consisted especially of participation in public life and debating with fellow citizens.

Women play no role whatsoever in Cicero's views on old age. In this respect, however, his views are no different from other classical Greeks or Romans or from the mainstream of modernity. Well into the twentieth century one of the basic (and absurd) assumptions has been that the primary representative of "mankind" is the adult male. Insofar as there was interest in old age at all, for a long time this only seemed interesting or important if it concerned older men. But the chances for older Romans to be fully respected were not very great; most of them had never enjoyed much respect, and those who had become too old to flex their muscles and impress the others could only hope to be respected for their glorious deeds in the past or try to hold their ground through rhetoric ability. It is not surprising that the Greek word for virtue, *arête,* means "male quality," especially "prowess" or "bravery," and the Latin *virtu,* means "male bravery" or "heroic deed."

Of course, such expressions and the "macho" culture associated with them are not unfamiliar, even in late modern culture. Fortunately, cultures are too complex to be pinned down to one trend or tendency. The Stoic lack of sensitivity for the basic quality of material circumstances in which people live and age is also evident in Cicero's text. This elitist origin does not necessarily imply that his views are only relevant for an elite, however. There is a more reflective side to the classical Greek and Roman cultures, and this side deserves the attention it has been given in this chapter. The culture of the philosophers was in many ways critically opposed to the political elite. The classical example of the possible consequences of such a position is the fate of Socrates, but Plato was also banned from Greece, and the Romans equally disliked the philosophers because they tended to think for themselves and were in that sense "unreliable." The Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius was unique in combining a position of political power with his philosophical work, but Cicero was murdered and Seneca forced to commit suicide, both for political reasons.

The Stoic philosophers emphasized the universal dignity of all human beings as world citizens (*kosmopolitai*), regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or class. The care of the self (*cura sui*) that they taught was less for representative purposes

and, especially in the work of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, rich in existential wisdom.

The Stoic exercises in care of oneself were detailed elaborations of the old Socratic principle that was kept vivid in the Platonic dialogues. However, instead of honoring wisdom as a horizon that could not be reached by mortals, the Stoics tried to bring wisdom as much as possible within reach of those who deserved it by their devoted efforts. In the Stoic school, friendship and community were highly valued; students and teachers lived together to create the best situation to learn the wisdom of living a good life. The Stoic *askesis* did not mean denial of needs but exercising self-knowledge: making plans in the morning, evaluating them at night, reading, meditation, conversations, writing letters, imagining how to cope with misfortune, and preparing for one's death. Through these practices, the wounds of the soul could be healed, enabling the student not to be dominated by emotions and passions but to strengthen the self for the tasks it can realistically assume, knowing the difference between what is important and what is unimportant, and accepting what cannot be changed. The lifelong attention that the exercises required makes it clear that the basic idea of the Stoics that the universe was divinely ordered did not mean that attaining a higher age or reaching old age would in itself guarantee wisdom.

Despite their differences, the Epicurean and Stoic schools both aimed at achieving a peace of mind (*ataraxia* or *tranquillitas animi*): an inner quietness of experience and reflection and an acceptance of the limitations of life. The value of these premodern perspectives is an intense awareness of the preciousness and fullness of life that is more likely to arise in a situation in which it is more difficult to ward off problems, disease, and death. This message does not, however, lose its importance because we live longer lives and do not feel as helpless in the face of worsening eyesight, bad hearing, infections, or appendicitis. In the last chapter I will return to the issues of time and wisdom in Greek and Roman philosophy, including them in a late modern project of an art of aging.

Conclusions

In the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, old age was not an issue of intense public debates as it has become in late modernity. Although these cultures

had a high respect for tradition, this did not mean that the aged were highly respected: in the aristocratic warrior cultures especially, bodily strength and military prowess enjoyed a high status. Although the power elites were challenged by more thoughtful cultures, the philosophers also refused to accept that anyone should be considered wise just because he had reached a higher age. Wisdom was widely respected but could not be separated from discussions and arguments where it was manifested by convincing others and gaining their respect. In Socratic philosophy, wisdom was seen as an unattainable ideal; what counted was to love wisdom and to strive to approach it more and more. Although Greek *philosophia,* or "love of wisdom," especially the work of Plato and Aristotle, has had an enormous theoretical influence throughout Western history, it also had a more practical side. Besides a strong metaphysical and abstract orientation, this philosophy had a vital connection with ways of living, and this interconnection was nourished in the different philosophical schools. These practical forms of philosophy were basically different elaborations of Socrates' call to take "care of oneself," a call that has led to several interesting works on the "art of living" in late modernity (e.g., Foucault 1990; Hadot 1995, 2002, 2009; Kekes 2002; Nehamas 2000).

Insofar as such careful attention for one's life or "soul," as Socrates would say, and practical wisdom in general are relevant for human beings, they are also relevant for aging persons, although the philosophical schools were aiming at educating the young. This does not mean that aging persons did not play an important role: they would be the teachers. In Plato's philosophy the truth is "ageless" and wisdom remains a matter of discursive and spiritual insight, but aging still plays a role because those who devote themselves to this path will need many years to arrive at a deeper understanding. They can not claim to be wise, but they will have become experienced and mature leaders. Plato gives prominence to this interrelation between devoted philosophical reflection and aging, for instance, in his elaboration of the meaning of being "on the threshold" of death and looking back at one's life. Although one would expect that Aristotle's ethics, with its attention to the vulnerability of human life, would be more respectful, there is hardly a more negative characterization of the old than Aristotle gave in his *Rhetorics.* The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers did not share such prejudice. Since they emphasized the importance of living a good life in the present, whether life would be long or short was of no importance to them. However, Cicero's *On Old Age,* the first extensive treatment of aging, integrated old age into the Stoic conception of

a harmonious cosmos as an important phase of life with its own meaningful ends and activities.

Cicero's treatise is the most elaborate example of a Stoic *art of life* that is continued into later life as an *art of aging*. Although problematic aspects of his treatise have been criticized above, it touches upon some themes that are important for present-day thinking about aging. The situation from which he develops his vision of aging shows some affinity with the situation of many "third-agers": people who are defined as old though they are still able to lead their lives and to participate in society in several ways (Lasslet 1991). Such a "third age" was largely absent before the twentieth century because the overwhelming majority of people had to continue whatever they were doing as long as they could in order to survive and would only enter old age when they had become unable to play their part. The emergence of a "third age" has something to do with the growing importance of mental activities over physical strength, which in Cicero's day was still a prerogative of the elite. He finds himself in a situation where he has much to offer in the public sphere but does not have the opportunity to do it or the respect he deserves even though he is materially independent. This remains a personal frustration and a waste of talent, although Cicero succeeds in transcending his isolation through his writing. He should be given credit for trying to develop a vision in which old age is not by definition a useless remainder of life as one waits for death, but a meaningful part of life. He does not deny a weariness at the end of a life lived to the full, but he does oppose a culturally enforced *premature* weariness wherein the challenges of life are abandoned too early because of negative views and social negligence concerning old age. Several other points deserve mentioning.

First of all, Cicero breaks with the defensive way of defining "aging well" as "staying young." He argues that since each phase of life has its own merits and qualities, one should develop what one has to offer as an older person, doing justice to the "nature" of old age. He pities the old men who lament that they have lost their sexual prowess, and, like Cephalus in the Socratic dialogue, he praises the great tranquility that can come in such matters as we get rid of "many and mad masters." More importantly, he emphasizes that each phase of life has its own pleasures and desires until all have been worn out and life comes to an end. We find the same motive in Seneca: "Well, we should cherish old age and enjoy it. It is full of pleasure if you know how to use it. Fruit tastes most delicious just when its season is ending. . . . Every pleasure defers

till its last its greatest delights. The time of life which offers the greatest delight is the age that sees the downward movement—not the steep decline—already begun: and in my opinion even the age that stands on the brink has pleasures of its own—or else the fact of not experiencing the want of any pleasures takes their place. How nice it is to have outworn one's desires and left them behind!" (Seneca 1982, 58).

A second aspect that is interesting from a late modern perspective is that Cicero sees it as an appropriate task of healthy aging persons to care for *others* and not to be cared for by younger people. The Stoic *cura sui,* care of oneself, is not a narcissistic self-love, but it aims at a care for others that is nourished by the care for oneself. It becomes clear that this self-care, which is the essence of philosophy as a way of life, is far from being just an intellectual activity. Moreover, it involves taking good care of the body (*cura sui corporis*): "taking exercise in moderation, and enough food and drink to strengthen yet not enough to overburden. However, the mind and spirit need even more attention than the body, for old age easily extinguishes them, like lamps when they are not given oil. And whereas exercises can wear the body out, they stimulate the mind" (*On Old Age,* 1960, 227).

Thirdly, according to the Stoics it would be good to educate for a whole life, including the hardships this may bring, and not just for a career. Cicero emphasizes that "old age must have its foundation well laid in early life": a good character and a strong will must be formed early and maintained throughout life to be able to face its challenges. We can still recognize the Socratic warning to Alcibiades that he must be able to lead his own life before assuming that he can lead others. But whereas Socrates added that it would be too late to begin with this when one has become 50 years old, the Stoic philosophers were inclined to agree with Epicurus, who advised in his "Letter to Menoeceus" that no one should delay the study of philosophy while young nor grow weary of it when old.

According to Hadot and Foucault, the search for a good life was one of the main concerns of ancient practical philosophy that has become marginalized in modernity. Before scientific approaches began to dominate practical concerns, medieval Christianity preached care of the "soul," with less emphasis on exploring and developing oneself and more on following rules and discovering how one would be tempted to deviate from these rules. What remained of the Greek and Roman care of oneself, according to Hadot and Foucault, was care of the bodiless soul: not to become able to guide yourself but to *be* guided; not for living here and now but for life after death. Actually, there are many

ways in which searching for wisdom and an art of life has been continued in fruitful combination with other traditions: Jewish, Christian, Renaissance, and Romantic (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming).

However this may be, the Greek idea of dedicating oneself to a deeper understanding of issues that people encounter as they get older can still play a role in inspiring a multiform late modern art of aging in which the mature voices of aging persons can be heard instead of being neglected or seen as a burden to society. This requires not only the possibility of enjoying a lifelong education but also education for a long life, so that young people can learn that a good old age is something they can look forward to instead of being educated to see their own future as a time of burden for oneself and others unless one can stay "forever young."

It is good to remember that in the ancient Greek culture a form of reflection has emerged that still attracts attention to counterbalance the one-sided emphasis on instrumental knowledge and information in late modernity and to remain involved in "things that matter," to use the terms that are typical of a materialist culture. Since the search for wisdom was also seen as an art of life, it was honorable to commit oneself to a common case, such as a debate about important issues at the *agora,* and to contribute to this in a way that could be respected as searching for wisdom. The classical Greek culture of the philosophers developed the interesting idea that wisdom was not a quality that people would acquire as soon as they entered old age, but it was something to love and search for. Moreover, because this search would take a long time, the chance to become wise as one lived longer increased, assuming one had sincerely pursued this path. Thus, aging and the attainment of wisdom may go together, because integrating and digesting important experiences and reflections can take a long time. In other words, older people were taken seriously if they took *themselves* seriously as responsibly reflecting and acting persons, without living off the presumed credit of their higher age.

The desire to live and to continue to experience beauty and light even in "crabbed old age" was voiced more than 2,500 years ago by the poet Sappho:

> But as for me, old age has got my whole
> body, my hair is white that once was dark
> my knees will not hold up
> to dance like the young fawns
> but what can I do?

To stay untouched by age, that cannot be . . .
(a lesson, so they say, the goddess Dawn
learned, when in her rose arms she bore Tithonus
off to the world's east limit; still old age
caught up with him . . .)

yet I love refinement, and beauty and light
are for me the same as desire for the sun. (in West 1993, 42)

4

Modern Science, the Discovery of a Personal History, and Aging Authentically

Introduction

Although we need to rethink the premodern roots of the art of aging, as I have done in the foregoing chapter, we also need to rethink its modern roots. Here we see ambivalences unfolding in prosperous late modern societies when more people are living longer because of improving life conditions but aging tends to lose its meaning. Although we can learn from historical studies that there is no reason to idealize the situations of the past, aging persons could often play important roles as carriers of knowledge and traditions. As soon as traditions cease to play a guiding role in late modernity and knowledge becomes a domain of expert systems, aging people tend to become marginalized and excluded from the central domains of society. Though there are important inequalities among aging people in late modern societies, it is not clear whether those who are thriving owe this to qualities related to aging or to the good fortune of being able to continue "normal" adult behavior such as gainful work for a longer time and thus protect themselves from ageism.

Compared to premodern cultures, increasing importance is given to instrumental approaches in modern societies, with the ambivalent results men-

tioned above. This emphasis on instrumentality suggests that concepts and experiences of time tend to be reduced to chronometric calculations. If we want to revitalize an art of aging that developed in the margins of the Greco-Roman culture around a practically oriented idea of philosophy as a search and longing for wisdom, we have, amongst other tasks, to reflect on the origins of the modern approaches to aging. Because these have been dominated by scientific paradigms, aging as a meaningful part of human life has mostly been reduced to objectified processes. Although the modern development of concepts of time can be seen as a process of increasing instrumentality and formality, there has also been an intense search for concepts of time that could enrich life as it is lived and offer fundamental perspectives for a late modern art of aging—one that is not opposed to good science or policy but integrates them in an inspiring and supportive culture of aging well.

Usually, this philosophical tradition has presented itself rather defensively in terms of a duality: their more qualitatively oriented interpretations of time were seen as superior to the scientific concepts that would actually be derived from them. If they noticed these interpretive approaches at all, scientists used to see them as vague and irrelevant until more recent developments in scientific cosmology, thermodynamics, and quantum physics opened a new chapter on time where non-objectifying perspectives can play a new role. In the following discussion I will argue that the qualitative, experiential concepts of time should be seen, not as opposed to scientific concepts but as supplementing or even presupposing each other.

In this chapter I neither glorify nor debunk scientific progress but try to show that it should be counterbalanced and guided by a culture that grants aging a dignified place as a meaningful process of human life. In this context I will emphasize that modernity has not only brought us objectifying sciences, but it has also contributed notions of authenticity and personhood that are crucial ingredients for developing a creative culture of aging, especially where modern philosophers explored personal experiences of living in time. To understand human aging more fully, we need more elaborated experiences and concepts of time.

I begin by discussing in 4.1 how the ultimate reality was seen in premodernity as essentially repeating itself. This provided the possibility of thinking of human life as a sequence of phases, each with its own cosmic or natural meanings, and gave aging persons the possibility of excelling in what will be discussed as "conventional" wisdom (6.2), because they could be seen as

persons with the most experience in a repetitive reality that harmonized well with a relatively static society. Modern science, which was heavily influenced by Newtonian physics, did not break with this idea of a repetitive reality but emptied it of meaning, although this newly emerging science tried to combine its objectifying approach with Christian ideas of a meaningful creation.

In 4.2 the question whether reality must be seen as repetitive or changing is taken up in discussing the question whether time must be seen as reversible or irreversible. The last answer is more in line with the way we tend to see aging and senescing as irreversible processes of living in time. This answer is indeed given by the sciences that study living nature, such as the disciplines of biology, instead of dead material, such as physics. However, both approaches use objectifying methods and work with temporal and spatial dimensions that neglect the perspectives of individual persons. All questions arise only for short-lived human beings, so we can still wonder where these perspectives leave us as human beings who are aware of living in time. In 4.3 I will explore the seventeenth-century development of natural science and the role of the rational individual, who was initially seen as its fundamental subject but whose role became minimized as science proceeded further. This loss of subjectivity was reflected in the crucial reduction of time to a mere epistemological presupposition, which left hardly any possibilities for articulating personal experiences of living in time. This result is made visible in the work of Kant, which is generally seen as the most important contribution of modern philosophy to the understanding of time. To counterbalance this, I will explore in 4.4 a rather neglected search for authentic living that focuses on personal experiences of living in time, leading us from the contemplations of the fifth-century bishop Augustine of Hippo to the twentieth-century thinkers Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger. They all develop conceptions of personal experienced time or living in time that are highly relevant for thinking about aging.

4.1. Aging in a World of Meaningful Repetition

After discussing the commercial anti-aging dynamics in chapter 2 the question arose whether we could not learn some important lessons about the meaning of aging from premodern or more traditional cultures. However, we have seen in chapter 3 that even in such premodern cultures as ancient Greece and Rome, respecting the elderly was not taken for granted. The search for a good and happy life rarely included aging well; therefore, Cicero's extension of the

art of living into a "good old age" was remarkable. Although the aristocratic warrior cultures with their reverence for military prowess were challenged by more thoughtful cultures, the philosophers also refused to accept that someone should be considered wise just because he had reached a higher age. However, it is also clear that in cultures that are more strongly guided by tradition, persons who have lived longer can attain advantageous positions. Because they have lived long enough to learn the specific teachings of their tradition and to see the recurrent patterns behind the daily changes, they can provide needed perspective on daily worries, burdens and preoccupations. Such a society does not put a premium on change or the "newest new" but on continuity and the old ways that are seen as reliable.

When thinking about the history of old age, it is important to keep in mind that aging has usually been seen in connection with the basic assumption that "reality" or "nature" will be eternally the same, or eternally repeating itself according to the same basic patterns. This conviction reigned from philosophy in its classical form (Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle) and was shared by science and philosophy until the nineteenth century. When the Greeks thought about the life course, they emphasized its repetitive character as phases of life followed each other: change had its place at the surface, but there would be "nothing new under the sun." Although there has always been a skeptical undercurrent in which the limitations of human knowledge were emphasized, the mainstream of European culture from the ancient Greeks until well into modernity was colored by the conviction that there was only one permanent Reality that had to be discovered by mortal humans, be it through Plato's *Anamnesis* of the Eternal Ideas or by observation and reasoning. Applied to the life course, this meant that there could be different subsequent phases, but that change would primarily take place *between* phases, not *within* them. This static model of aging as "old age" can be seen in the traditional images of clearly distinguished seasons, phases, or "ages of man"—the latter a title that, significantly, the authors of two different studies about medieval interpretations of the life cycle (Burrow 1986; Sears 1986) chose independently of each other. This way of thinking about aging, strangely enough, is still widespread; static terms such as "being old," "old people," "old age," or "senescence" are still widely used in contemporary discourses about aging. However, the accumulation of wisdom has tended to disappear behind pathological visions of accumulating diseases.

Because of the assumption that nature would eternally repeat itself, the idea can easily arise that a repetitive form of time such as chronometric time would

give reliable indicators of these repetitive changes. This is one of the origins of the deeply rooted misconception that chronometric age is a reliable indicator of senescing or even aging. In this respect it is instructive to return briefly to Aristotle, since he included in his *Physics* a text that is not only still basic to modern thinking about chronometric time but also contains a fundamental distinction that is important for my critique of chronometric age. Aristotle already tries to distinguish between the rhythms or movements of nature on the one hand and the concept of time on the other. He begins his analysis of the concept of "time" with a discussion of change in general, including the movements of nature. However, time is not identified with these movements, because whereas movements are always specific and can stop, time necessarily continues. This opens the possibility of measuring movements or processes in time. As a result, the concept of chronometric time emerges: "Time is just this—number of movement in respect of 'before' and 'after' " (Aristotle, *Physics* 219b1). This emphasis on *numbers* that represent the eternal repetition of the cosmos already had a long history in Aristotle's day, dating back to Babylonian and Egyptian cosmology and returning in Plato's *Timaeus:* "[A]s He set in order the Heaven, of that Eternity which abides in unity He made an eternal image, moving according to number, even that which we have named Time" (37d; Wendorff 1980). Aristotle, however, being more of a "scientist" than his teacher Plato, tries to clarify the conceptual status of chronometric time in relation to the rhythms of nature. The distinction he makes between them can also serve as a first step to understanding that bodily rhythms relevant in senescing processes do not necessarily run in synchrony with age.

It is interesting to note that we encounter already in Aristotle's work the deeply rooted tendency to confuse what he has just distinguished so well. This leads to the misunderstanding that chronometric time is the *cause* of decay and thus also of senescing. In his *Physics,* he comments on a common saying of his day that "time wastes things away, that all things grow old through time, and that people forget owing to the lapse of time." Aristotle agrees with this saying because "[t]ime is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is the number of change, and change removes what is" (*Physics* 221a31-b1–2). Of course, "change" by definition "removes"—although it also adds or renews—but time as the *number* of change is not what causes change; it just helps to measure durations of processes.

There is, however, an important difference between premodern and modern conceptions: although both maintain that "nature," "the universe," or

"reality" consist of repetitive patterns or "natural laws," premodern views emphasize that this enveloping nature is a meaningful cosmos: a harmonious ideal that both society and humans should try to imitate (as a micro cosmos) throughout their lives, although this rarely included a "good old age." This conviction dominated the ways in which nature was seen not only in Greek thought but throughout the Middle Ages, although under the influence of Christianity it was usually reinterpreted as *creation*. Aristotle's understanding of nature and its movements underlines their marvelous harmony: nature (*physis*) brings order, creates, and forms; it always strives for the most perfect and best and may be seen as guarding the teleological order of the world. It is not a *chaos* but a *cosmos*. An eternal unity embraces all temporal things and is present in them, and in that sense nature can be seen as a divinely working force (Aristotle, *De Caelo* II, 1, 283b). Even when Aristotle denies in other texts that nature itself can be regarded as divine but should rather be seen as dependent on a divine spirit that has inaugurated the movements of nature (*Metaphysics* 7, 9), these movements are still meaningfully related to the understanding of "human life."

We have seen that this idea of nature as guiding human life became central in the way of life of the Stoic philosophers. However, a view of nature as a meaningful cosmos that surrounds and leads human beings does not necessarily imply that "old age" or "old people" are positively portrayed, as we have seen in discussing Aristotle's construction of the life course (3.2). Old age could be seen as a state of wisdom and fulfillment but also as a state of decline and despair (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming). Only in isolated writings such as Cicero's *On Old Age* was there more than a residual attention for old age as a meaningful phase of life (see 3.3.). Such neglect of aging still dominates most discourses about human life or the life course. The idealization of military prowess, bodily strength, productivity, or being sexy and successful has throughout history led to a depreciation of the potentials of aging and its profound meanings for human life in general.

4.2. (Ir)reversible Time and the Senescing of Organisms

Aristotle's understanding of nature as a perfect, good, beautiful, and divine cosmos (*De Caelo* I, 9, 279a) was still dominant at the end of the Middle Ages in combination with Christian ideas of a perfect creation. The modern natural scientists, however, were looking in a different direction as they tried

to understand the secrets of nature through objectifying experiments and mathematical reasoning. They were not impressed by the traditional narratives about nature and tended to see them as outdated and repressive, with little consequence for the many practical problems that were facing ordinary people who lived outside castles, monasteries, and palaces. Even the theories of those who wanted to break away from the dark Middle Ages and sought to articulate a new perspective for life were helpless and relatively useless. As a way to compensate for this weakness, they often tried to impress the reader by assuming an authoritative position of all-embracing knowledge. Interesting examples of such practically oriented metaphysics of life extension be found, for example, in the work of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who wrote "Three Books on Life" in which he instructed the reader on how to achieve a long life and evoked everything that could serve to convince him: the Greek gods, the Bible, the "essential nature" of the planets, and magical traditions. Besides offering advice that might still appeal to us, such as eating the best meat and drinking the best wine, he gives many instructions that strike us as odd, to say the least. For example, in chapter 11 of the "Second Book," we read:

> Immediately after the age of seventy and sometimes after sixty-three, since the moisture has gradually dried up, the tree of the human body often decays. Then for the first time this human tree must be moistened by a human, youthful liquid in order that it may revive. Therefore choose a young girl who is healthy, beautiful, cheerful, and temperate, and when you are hungry and the Moon is waxing, suck her milk; immediately eat a little powder of sweet fennel properly mixed with sugar. The sugar will prevent the milk from curdling and putrefying in the stomach; and the fennel, since it is fine and a friend of the milk, will spread the milk to the bodily parts. . . . There is a common and ancient opinion that certain prophetic old women who are popularly called "screech-owls" suck the blood of infants as a means, insofar as they can, of growing young again. Why shouldn't our old people, namely, those who have no other recourse, likewise suck the blood of a youth?—a youth, I say, who is willing, happy, and temperate, whose blood is of the best but perhaps too abundant. They will suck, therefore, like leeches, an ounce or two from a scarcely-opened vein of the left arm; they will immediately take an equal amount of sugar and wine; they will do this when hungry and thirsty and when the moon is waxing. (Ficino 1989, 197f.)

Such narratives could not deal with the many changes and questions that arose in the early modern society where cities and markets began to exert

their influence, citizens acquired new wealth and independence, and daring explorers opened up new horizons. Other, more reliable forms of knowledge, but also more impartial forms of *legitimizing* knowledge, were badly needed. The rise of "heresy," new "sects," and the Inquisition since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were ominous signs of the intense clashes between established traditions and new orientations that led to the extended violent crises of early modernization (Baars 2006a). Eventually, during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), another period of extended suffering and bloodshed between followers of different religions, modern scholars developed the strong desire to construct a solid and transparent rational foundation to ascertain the Truth. By transcending the many different views that contradicted each other, it would be possible to stop the endless bloodshed of people wanting to convert or kill each other. As Stephen Toulmin notes in *The Hidden Agenda of Modernity,* "The 17th century philosopher's Quest for Certainty was no mere proposal to construct abstract and timeless intellectual schemas, dreamed up as objects of pure, detached intellectual study. Instead, it was a timely response to a specific historical challenge—the political, social, and theological chaos embodied in the Thirty Years' War" (1990, 70). Thus, the desire to discover eternally unchanging universal laws and thus to be able to stop arguing about what the "truth" or "reality" might be, can be understood as emerging from a miserable situation, inspired by hope for an emancipation of mankind through rational knowledge.

During the seventeenth century a new, objectifying way of studying nature gradually evolved, often still mixed with magical elements that strike us as bizarre but gradually breaking away from traditional convictions about the ways nature both outside and inside humans should be understood. Far from being a sudden "scientific revolution" (Shapin 1998), it was a gradual process that took some centuries as instrumental knowledge began to be developed that actually proved effective in handling specific instrumental problems.

Important steps on the path to a new objectifying approach to nature through logical deduction and empirical experiments were, for instance, the pioneering work of Galileo (1564–1642), who developed a mathematical approach to nature; Descartes' philosophical reflection of this program; and Newton's physical cosmology. René Descartes (1596–1650) rebelled against a vague and helpless traditional philosophy and announced the discovery of a "practical philosophy" by means of which, "knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies that surround

us," we would be able to "render ourselves lords and possessors of nature." This ambitious program would not only be characterized by clarity of concepts but also be eminently practical. It would even imply "that we could free ourselves from an infinity of maladies of body as well as mind, and perhaps also even from the debility of age, if we had sufficiently ample knowledge of their causes" (Descartes 1994, 46f.).

The freedom to approach the human body as an object that can be studied in itself, as did Vesalius (1514–1564) with his revolutionary anatomical studies, without running the risk of being prosecuted for violating spiritual dogmas, opened the way to modern advances in understanding and curing human bodies. However, the dominant tendency became to see life and human beings as mere manifestations of material processes that should be controlled by manipulating their causal structures. Moreover, the brilliant work of Isaac Newton (1642–1727) on the laws that were governing nature in a cosmological perspective led modern science in a direction that was much more detached from the concerns of human life that were of central importance to Descartes. Newton revolutionized the understanding of nature by explaining everyday occurrences, such as an apple falling from a tree, as well as the movements of the planets by the same law of universal gravitation. In the eyes of his contemporaries, this work eradicated all previous theories of nature and gave empirical, experimental science, in combination with mathematical analysis, an eminent position.

The view of nature has changed. It is still seen as eternally the same, especially in cosmological terms, but in a way that does not generate a new meaningful relation with the objectified universe. In modern science, "nature" becomes identical with "reality," "the universe," or "life" insofar as these can be studied "objectively," building on experiments and "hard facts." Nature is seen as governed by eternal causal laws that can not only be discovered but can also lead to *controlling* nature since the causal laws can, paradoxically, be manipulated to get the desired results. This model of causal control is a crucial component of the modern program to control nature for the sake of "the progress of humanity." Of course, this strategy was especially applied to solve problems that were closer to human concerns than cosmological issues that could hardly be influenced, but it continued the same idea of detached objectivity. Although modern science gradually lost the conviction that nature is a well-ordered and harmonious cosmos, it still cherished the idea that nature is governed by laws that are eternally the same but should be discovered in

order to be able to manipulate them so that life can be re-created in a way that would satisfy human desires.

As opposed to a vision of nature as inherently meaningful and harmonious, modern scientific approaches methodically reduced nature to mere matter, and its eternal movements to causal processes. The attractiveness of modern instrumental approaches was the possibility of gaining more influence over natural processes that might have been seen as meaningful in traditional narratives, but that left one helpless in confronting many practical problems that could be conquered through the modern experimental approaches. This did not mean, however, that the problems encountered by aging people were high on the agenda; the idea that old age comes with problems that cannot be helped has been a persistent one.

Does Nature Repeat Itself Eternally?

Newtonian physics did not imply a clean break with the concept of an unchanging reality; it only gave this concept a scientific foundation. Basically, Newton's ideas turn the universe into a clock that moves without any aim. In this mechanical view of nature, time is detached from living nature; it does not even have a definite direction but can be reversed, just as, in principle, each movement of the abstract and meaningless universe would be reversible. The laws of mechanics would still be true in a reversed sequence of movements: when light goes one way, it can also be reflected the other way; when a planet turns one way, it might, in principle, also turn the other way. In contrast to our intuition, fundamental theories of Newtonian physics appear to be "time symmetric"; consequently, whether or not time is reversible has remained an important issue of theoretical debate (Greene 2005; Mainzer 1988; Rickles 2007).

However, nineteenth century thinkers as different as Hegel and Nietzsche began to doubt whether reality would remain essentially the same and began to appreciate almost-forgotten views of the earliest of Greek philosophers, notably those of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus from Ephesus (544–483 BC), who emphasized that "everything changes constantly and nothing remains still." Since the nineteenth century, various scientists have challenged the idea that we would live in an eternally unchanging nature that repeats its processes infinitely. Scientists such as Buffon, Darwin, and many others started to organize systematically the accumulating evidence that the species we find in nature are the result of long processes of change and that the earth itself is a

product of a long and ongoing evolution. During the twentieth century it was shown that the same is true for our bodies and brains (Kirkwood 1999; Toulmin and Goodfield 1965). Insofar as such evolutionary processes were still infused with ideas of a direction or "progress," they have increasingly been disconnected from such ideas and replaced by evolutionary approaches that give predominance to accidental change and to conceptions of spontaneously originating order and self-organizing complexity (Dennett 1996; Holland 1999; Kauffman 1993, 2002; Waldrop 1992). These neo-evolutionary perspectives may contribute to understanding the phenomenon that biological entities such as animals and humans constitute their own rhythms of living and senescing within the limits of their species and their contexts. The tendency to conceptualize this in terms of biological clocks shows again the tendency to relate all temporal processes to metric time, as if this were the ultimate goal of our knowledge of time.

At this point we must distinguish between "nature" in a cosmological and an evolutionary, bodily sense. Going from the cosmological to the evolutionary and bodily level, an increasing importance is given to human activity and social contexts. In *cosmological* studies, the importance of human activity is limited to its efforts to understand cosmological processes; that is, given the present state of our technology, we cannot assume that the sun, the Milky Way, or the universe will alter their processes as a result of our activities. Although Newton's assumption that the planets would eternally revolve around the sun in the same harmonious course has proven false, since it turned out that there are minor irregularities that may, in the very long run of cosmology, even lead to a collision between planets, we cannot assume that these changes have been caused or even affected by anything we have been doing on earth, including cosmological studies. This gives cosmology the status of the preeminent paradigm that can proceed objectively, since the processes it studies are not influenced by human activities: we just change our understanding of them. This understanding of science, however, is not adequate for all domains of research or study.

The situation is already different for nature in an *evolutionary* sense; it is most likely that activities of the human species and its predecessors have influenced their evolution. We can think of different ways of hunting, caring, and living together leading to different chances of survival and possibly to different patterns of senescing for men and women (Hrdy 1999). Finally, for nature in the micro sense of *bodily* processes, it is evident that these processes,

including processes of senescing, are importantly influenced by human activities. Just think of nourishment, health care, and lifestyle in general, and their consequences in terms of different life expectancies.

These distinctions imply that it would be inadequate for aging studies to adopt a type of objectivity that would be adequate for cosmological studies, although there is a widespread tendency to regard nature in general as if it had the ontological objectivity of cosmological movements as studied by Newton. Because processes of senescing show enormous variations in different contexts, it makes sense to leave the idea that nature repeats itself mechanically and to move from physics as *the* science of (dead) nature, to studies of living natural phenomena that evolve and change as they reproduce themselves. Such scientific approaches to nature as genetics emerged gradually with the discovery of evolutionary processes that undermined the idea that nature would repeat the same patterns eternally. Recent developments in such fields as thermodynamics or self-organizing complexity are especially interesting for the understanding of time and senescing because they underline that complex living phenomena do not reproduce themselves according to eternally identical programs but change in interaction with constitutive contexts.

Nature Changes and Time Is Irreversible

The Brussels school that centered around Nobel Prize laureate Ilya Prigogine developed a concept of time that is more in line with the human experience of a time that passes irreversibly. Many of their explorations (Nicolis and Prigogine 1989; Prigogine 1996) throw a fascinating new light on the understanding of time, and, paradoxically, some of their pathbreaking scientific claims harmonize well with everyday intuitions.

The elaboration of the evolutionary idea of a constantly changing and "spontaneously" restructuring reality is one of the most interesting intellectual developments of the twentieth century. According to Prigogine's elaboration of nineteenth-century explorations of thermodynamics by scientists such as Carnot, Clausius, and Bolzmann, time is not reversible but *irreversible*. The second law of thermodynamics states that in isolated energy systems an increase of entropy occurs, that is, a transition of an ordered situation to a less ordered or less useful state.

Most people will intuitively agree with Prigogine's thesis concerning the irreversibility of natural processes. We see this every day: if cold milk is poured into hot coffee, the result will be a uniform temperature inside the mug,

which will then gradually approximate the surrounding temperature. The coffee will get irreversibly colder if no exterior heat is added. Although the first law of thermodynamics (also called the law of conservation of energy) states that all energy remains conserved, the meaning of its second law is, in simple terms, that the *usefulness* of this energy diminishes (its entropy increases). In that sense, the gas and water that were needed to make coffee are "gone"; they cannot be re-used to make new coffee again and again. In fairy tales the same gold coin can be taken out of the pocket time after time, yet in everyday life it seems evident that once we have used a certain amount of energy it is no longer at our disposal. The reality we live in is finite in all situations and constantly changing in one direction: tomorrow, today will have become yesterday. We may try to do something again, to experience something again, or to make amends for something done, yet this does not mean that we can do so at the same moment. One of the reasons that chronometric time has become so important is that it enables us to map this irreversible change by counting the years, months, days, hours, and minutes.

According to many contemporary time theorists, a new time concept is emerging from the theories on "self-organization," which could reconcile a classic antithesis, that between the physical concept of time and the philosophical efforts seeking to fathom the human experience of living in time (Griffin 1986). Prigogine even maintains that anticipations of the newest developments in the sciences can already be found in philosophical work by Bergson, Whitehead, and Heidegger. The difference would be that these philosophers developed their views in criticizing the sciences, whereas nowadays they are the result of scientific research (Prigogine 1981; Sandbothe 1998). We shall see, however, that there are still considerable differences between Prigogine's theory of time and the personal time perspectives that will be discussed further below (4.2).

Senescing, Irreversible Time, and the Organism

The second law of thermodynamics has been drawn upon to develop a general theory of senescing processes. Although this law referred in its classical form to *closed* systems in a state of *equilibrium,* its gerontological application has been inspired by later varieties of thermodynamics dealing with open, or "dissipative," systems that are far from equilibrium. In spite of this change, senescing is still explained as an accumulation of entropy (Schroots and Birren 1988; Yates 2006) that can be associated with errors in DNA replication

and other increasingly chaotic processes in senescing bodies. These theories see senescing as a process that occurs in all multicellular living systems that adopt a more or less definite form after a period of growth.

That time can be understood in Newtonian physics as reversible is seen by these theorists as evidence that physics has taken too little interest in living systems that adapt to their environments in complex ways and develop self-organizing dynamics as they live. This dynamic self-organization implies creative changes and therefore living in irreversible time; moreover, for most living systems there is a finite energy budget on which the organism has to survive. As a way to clarify human senescing, Yates (in Baars and Visser 2007) presents this energy budget as a conical helix with a diameter that diminishes from the beginning of maturity. The diameter of the cone is determined by the energy available per cycle of twenty-four hours; the daily amount of energy would decrease with the age of the organism (see fig. 4.1).

The interesting aspect of this approach is that it links two types of "biological clocks." The first type refers to processes that repeat themselves during a period of twenty-four hours and that are necessary to make the human organism function: so-called circadian rhythms. Measured in chronometric time, these processes vary from milliseconds (in the case of brain functions), seconds (such as heartbeats) to hours (the rhythms of eating, drinking, sleeping and waking). These processes are embedded in cycles of twenty-four hours, within which their rhythms change; the heartbeat slows down during sleep, for example. The second type of biological clock is connected to the organism's self-regulation during its entire life span, for example, the limited number of monthly cycles of the female reproductive system until the menopause, when the hormonal secretion of estrogen and progesterone diminishes. The irreversible biological time is presented by Yates as a conical helix, whose diameter keeps decreasing until the energy budget is so exhausted that threats from the organism itself (such as free radicals) or from the environment (such as viral infections), which caused no problems before, become insuperable.

That time can only be irreversible may seem evident, but in physics there is still doubt regarding the status of (neo)thermodynamic theories. Let me point to two questions, without going into details that are fervently discussed by specialists. The first question is whether the second law of thermodynamics is a natural law at all, or whether it is related to conditions of probability. A second question is whether that law only applies to macro-phenomena, which, however, presuppose microphysical processes that are reversible.

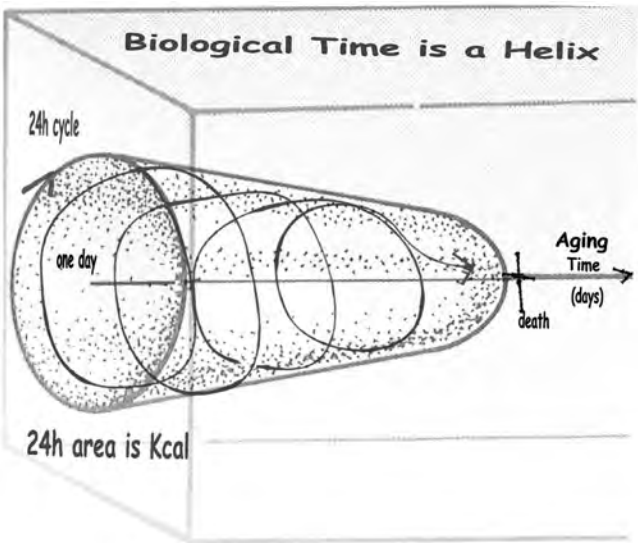

Fig 4.1 Biological Time as a Conical Helix (Yates 2006, p. 274; used with permission of the author)

Concerning the application of the second law of thermodynamics to explain senescing, there are other, more concrete problems. First, as soon as a certain system or organism is in any way open to its environment, its processes are no longer autonomous or intrinsic because the environment will influence or co-constitute them. The second problem is the flipside of the first: when we find an intrinsic quantity that can be calibrated as the "age" of some finite entity that changes over time, such an intrinsic age can hardly form the basis for a *general* scale with which we could measure the "intrinsic age" of other systems. In other words: there may be as many "intrinsic" ages as there are (sub)systems (Uffink 2007). For the analysis of senescing, this would imply that there are many (functional) ages: cells, different organs, or parts of the skeleton would have their own age that would, however, be influenced by the environments of these cells or organs inside the human body but also by personal lifestyles and social contexts. This brings a valuable refinement to the discussion of senescing but shows at the same time that there cannot be one clear "age" that would indicate the functional state of a human being. We have encountered this problem already in the first two chapters, when we discussed chronometric aging (1.4) and the elusive "real age" (2.2); functional ages depend both on intrinsic processes and their complex interactions with constitutive contexts.

The continuing debate over whether time is reversible or irreversible also shows that scientific concepts of time are scarcely adequate to understand human temporal experience, any more than can our personal impressions concerning the velocity of an object be a deciding factor in scientific measurements. On the one hand, the scientific vistas are inspiring and imaginative, and they generate new theories and new questions. On the other hand, the spontaneous emergence of new orders and the self-organization of complexity that might generate revolutionary changes of human senescing usually presuppose evolutionary dimensions that exceed by far the lifespan of individuals. The circadian (day-night) rhythms or "biological clocks" that play an important role in many physiological processes such as body temperature, blood pressure, or hormone secretion may have developed as a result of "spontaneous" self-organization of human life in an environment where the solar system imposes its 24-hour rhythms (Albrecht 2002). This does not imply, however, that individuals can "spontaneously," without major survival risks, change their circadian rhythms into, for instance, a rhythm of 120 hours of work followed by 8 hours of sleep, although this would be a more productive adaptation to contemporary society.

The enormity of the distance between the time perspectives of many of these scientific theories on the one hand, and human lives on the other, is nicely illustrated by the following example in which the theory of relativity is applied to human aging: the so-called "Twin Paradox of Aging" (Uffink 2007). Its starting point is the postulate from the special theory of relativity that the rhythm of measurement of a clock depends on its movement. If two clocks move at the same speed and in the same direction through space, the time each of them will show will be the same. However, if the position of one of the clocks remains the same, while the other is moving, the postulate of the theory of relativity implies that the moving clock will run more slowly than the clock that remains in the same position. This is the famous "time dilation effect." In a thought experiment, this can be applied to human aging: one of two identical twins—the type of human beings that has been a favorite for experimental purposes—stays on earth, while the other makes an unprecedented journey through the Milky Way. When the astronaut returns, only one year has passed, according to the clocks in her spaceship, but her sister has become fifty years older while waiting for her.

However, within the same scientific discourse quite a few obstacles must

be removed before this anti-aging remedy can be offered. First, it may take some time before it will be possible to build a spaceship capable of reaching the enormous speed required. Indeed, the theory may be true for elementary particles, but then these can approach the velocity of light (some 186,000 miles or 300,000 km. per second). Second, the space travel involved would probably entail an enormous physical burden that would result in rapid senescing, if the body could survive at all. Third, this example remains again within chronometric time. After all, nothing is said about how the space-trotter will experience the lapse of time during her journey. As a year dragging on within the confines of a high-pressure-prison? As an ordeal undermining her vitality? As an exhilarating event flying by? And how will she feel about the fifty years she could not spend with those who were dear to her and waited for her, if they are still alive?

The time dimensions of the evolution of life on earth are counted in millions, that of the universe in billions, of years. These perspectives have their own merit and fascination, and they may be experienced by human beings as overwhelming yet also as irrelevant to their lives—just as irrelevant as these lives appear to be in the evolution of the universe. A more directly appealing relevance of the theories of open systems is their interdisciplinary message. As already noted, as soon as a certain system or organism is in any way open to its environment, its processes are no longer autonomous or intrinsic, since the environment will influence or co-constitute them. Even from such crude data as life expectancies, we can conclude that social contexts in a broad sense (including the qualities of interpersonal relationships, nourishment, labor markets, health care, and cultures of aging) play a critical role in supporting or undermining human lives. Such a critical analysis of contexts would be a task for a critical gerontology (cf. Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006). Since this book takes a different approach, the connection with the theories of open, self-organizing systems takes place at another angle. In principle, these theories acknowledge the role of human activity in co-constituting change, but the finite time horizons that are inherent in the notion of irreversible time can only unfold their meaningful potential when they are experienced by human beings who are not just finite organisms but *know about* their finitude. This knowledge has profound implications for the ways in which they lead their lives. The next section will therefore be devoted to a discussion of time and modern subjectivity, with a focus on the implications for aging as living in time.

4.3. The Idealization of Science and the Epistemological Reduction of Time

As we saw before, a modern thinker like Descartes expected that the rational subject would become the center of control in the causally clarified universe, but the contemporary experience is more likely to be one of being lost in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the expanding Big Bang universe that appear to be meaningless and to defy all imagination. The short breath of human life seems to get lost in an inhospitable, cold, and dark universe. As the scissors of cosmological time open, it seems to become an illusion that even a long human life could mean anything in the face of such immense proportions—a conflict that fascinated the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1986) toward the end of his life. In his philosophical and historical treatise *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit,* he reflected on the change of the temporal dimensions of life and the world in general as a consequence of developments in cosmology. Whereas it was originally thought that the distances on earth were gigantic and the distances to the stars small, an opposite view gradually emerged: the distances on earth appear to be negligibly tiny compared to the distances in the universe, which are measured in time as light-years. Here, time has become meaningless space.

However, we can still derive some orientation and inspiration from the fact that although a human being may seem nothing more than a short, egocentric breath in a huge cosmic wind, it is only in these short breaths of human lives that everything of importance manifests itself and all questions arise. To be able to appreciate such temporal living, we need perspectives that allow a relativization of scientific objectivism and instrumentality. We can only begin to look for meaningful perspectives on human aging and integrate objectifying approaches if human *aging* is not reduced simply to *senescing:* a mere change and deterioration of biological functions over time. Such a relativization does not deny the importance of scientific approaches but suggests that they need to be integrated in a culture of aging well. Appreciating the valuable contributions of science should not obstruct the ability to see its limitations.

This rethinking of the contributions of science needs to go together with a rethinking of time: categorizing people from the outside because of their age can only be countered effectively by replacing it with a meaningful understanding of aging as living in time. Living in time can be measured, but it

should not be reduced to measurements: we need the perspective of persons who *experience* living in time.

As we have seen, Greek and Roman as well as medieval scholars were convinced that the *cosmos* or *creation* they were living in was meaningfully related to the lives of human beings. Their relationship to "reality," "the world," or "life" was not yet dominated by the modern ambitions to exercise and extend control through causal knowledge. However, old age was often a threatening perspective, since there was little help for any hardship that might arise. The flipside of the progress, however fragile, that has taken place in alleviating suffering is the highly problematic tendency to approach persons as if they are mere objects that should be put in categories, counted, and compared with other categories, like keeping an inventory up to date. A glance at some of the many reports about the "aged" or "elderly" will give many examples of such managerial strategies. A similar instrumentalist reductionism can be found in approaches that reduce human *aging* to biological deterioration.

Of course, adequate demographic monitoring can play an important role in developing policies for a population during extended periods of time, in assessing needs or problems, and in planning facilities. However, it is also clear that good demographics will not lead to a more respectful approach to aging; this has to come from other sources, where the uniqueness of persons can be articulated and acknowledged. Similarly, there may be important advances in curing pathologies or in slowing down processes of senescing, but this also remains unsatisfactory when it fails to be integrated into more meaningful and supportive cultures of human aging. The most authoritative approaches to aging in late modern society are usually inspired by scientific models and ideals of objectivity that come from a tradition of studying "nature" or "reality" as something that can be approached and managed instrumentally. We are confronted with a deeply rooted (and in some aspects highly successful) tradition in which, however, all aspects of human being that cannot be captured in quantitative models are neglected.

The modern ambitions to control reality, "the world," or life also characterize the self-understanding that human beings develop in the modern world. Descartes' famous formula was "I think, therefore I am" (*Cogito ergo sum*), which announced the freedom to think for oneself instead of being obliged to follow authoritarian dogmas. However, he was more interested in founding his *thinking* than in understanding his *being*. Although he speaks of his "soul,"

he approaches his existence in terms of things: his consciousness is conceived as a thinking thing (*Res cogitans*) that encounters the outer world which is made up of things that are extended in space (*Res extensa*), part of which is his own body. This self-instrumentalization unfolds its full consequences: the modern rational subject sees itself initially as the foundation (*subiectum*) of science, but as modern science expands, human beings end up being part of the "subject matter" of science. The result of these developments is a gradual marginalization of the rational subject into a mere presupposition of a science it cannot generate from its own innate rational faculties but can merely reconstruct. This idealization of science neglects that human beings are not living in anonymous and abstract dimensions that can only be made understandable by measurements, but they live with unique others and are recognized by them as unique persons in shared life worlds that cannot adequately be understood through objectivistic measurements.

The rise of modern scientific objectivism also changes the understanding of *time,* which becomes just a presupposition in the operation of the natural sciences—a change that is already anticipated in Descartes' *Principia Philosophia* (Principles of Philosophy), published in 1644, where time becomes just a *modus cogitandi,* a "mode of thinking" (1994, 171). The dominance of natural science also leads to an important ambivalence in Kant's thinking, which is often regarded as the most important modern contribution to the philosophy of time. Kant addresses especially the epistemological foundations of Newton's natural science but also criticizes the idea that time has a subject-independent reality. This has often been taken to imply that time is *only* subjective (McTaggert 1908; cf. Dummett 1960). To strengthen the view that Kant thought that time was merely subjective, a line from his *Critique of Pure Reason* is usually cited: "Time is therefore a purely subjective condition of our (human) intuition (which is always sensible, that is, so far as we are affected by objects), and in itself, apart from the subject, is nothing." However, Kant continues with the following sentence, which is most often omitted but which makes clear that he wants to grasp the *relation* between the subjectivity and objectivity of time: "Nevertheless, in respect of all appearances, and therefore of all the things which can enter into our experience, it is necessarily objective." With this in mind, Kant then speaks of the "empirical reality" of time—that is to say, of its "objective validity in respect of all objects, which allow of ever being given to our senses" (Kant 1965, B 51ff.). Kant's philosophy of time is clearly concerned with the transcendental presuppositions of

Newton's physics and therefore analyzes concepts such as *duration, succession,* and *simultaneity,* which are inherent in the use of chronometric time.

The crucial point is that the subjective experience of time is reduced to a mere presupposition of the empirical knowledge of the world that is gained in Newtonian natural science. Kant even emphasizes that time cannot be experienced; it is a mere "form of our inner sense," and this inner sense remains unknown: "[S]o far as inner intuition is concerned, we know our own subject only as appearance, not as it is by itself" (Kant 1965, B 156).

Although the rigorous methodical efforts of Descartes, Kant, and their followers helped to claim an independent way to understand the world without having to rely on traditional authorities, the result is a highly abstract construction of an anonymous, bodiless, and ageless "rational subject" who has put all his trust in a formalistic kind of reasoning, leaving just a residual perspective on *experiences* of living in time. However, there remains some hope for a revitalization of these rationalistic schemes because Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* can be interpreted to argue that there cannot be pure knowledge without mediation by the *finite* conditions of subjective rationality. We will see below how this emphasis on the finite conditions of human knowledge of time will be transformed into a philosophy of finite existence and temporal living by Heidegger.

In a brilliant collection of essays called *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972), the German philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have characterized the development of modern rationality as an Odyssey in which the rational "subject" (the exemplary gathering of all rational faculties in an idealized "modern" human being) struggles to gain control over an objectified nature that includes his own body. One of the main points of their critique is that the rationally controlling subject becomes confused and caught in his own attempts to dominate a nature he himself is part of (Baars 1987). Their analysis implies a warning that it is crucial: to acknowledge the limitations that are inherent in "objectively" analyzing a reality that we cannot purely approach from the outside because we remain inside. As bodily beings, we remain part of nature, but not in the same way as plants or animals because we also remain, as human beings, part of human life worlds. Similarly, we cannot step out of time: even in studying aging as living in time, we continue to live in time—an existential conundrum that has major methodological consequences such as have been discussed in the first chapter (see 1.4).

With all the necessary criticism of its destructive aspects (for instance, in

ecological terms), I would also maintain that some progress has been made through the technological application of causal knowledge—although Adorno and Horkheimer would find it hard to agree with this. However, the contemporary treatment or prevention of diseases through better hygiene or vaccination, for instance, relies on a better understanding of the effects of specific bacteria or viruses. Furthermore, we have seen the development of more reliable means of transportation, international communication, heating, surgery, dental care or prostheses; the list can become very long if we become aware of the multitude of accomplishments that we take for granted. Scientific knowledge can be used for good purposes, and we can scarcely say that processes of aging have had too much attention from researchers. There may still be much to discover in studies of senescing as well as in other relevant areas of research such as more effective prevention and better treatment of cancer. Human aging can benefit from objectifying knowledge about biological senescing and medical pathology, but it should not be reduced to this. Even if our highest expectations were to be realized, this would not mean that we can speak of unambiguous progress, nor would such accomplishments in themselves guarantee a good life. The mere application of scientific knowledge does not in itself lead to a good life. It must be integrated into a search for a good life—including aging well—while acknowledging the inability to control life because such attempts remain a *part* of life.

To acknowledge such a principal lack of control is contrary to the endeavor of science, because science will always try to extend its horizons of knowledge and control without knowing where this may lead. Both complete trust and distrust of science are inadequate answers to this predicament. We must be more aware of the inability of science to guide itself or to acknowledge its own limits. The idea that science will take meaningful directions of its own also neglects the reality that investors play a major role in determining the direction and targets of research programs. Research tends to flourish in areas where investments promise huge returns—for instance, when treatments for diseases or disabilities could be found that are important for the rich part of the world although this would increase global inequalities.

Moreover, the situation gets more complex as science can no longer be seen as just a solver of problems but also creates dangers of its own (Beck 1992). Examples are abundant, from hospital infections with a superbug to ecological risks and the proliferation of nuclear bombs. The situation we are confronted with is not that scientific knowledge controls causally predictable

change, but that scientific knowledge has also become a *part* of unpredictable change. Typically, such risks are professionally "assessed" and "managed." In other words, risks that are *internally* produced are treated as *external* risks. This may be of some use, but it does not confront us with the limitations of control that are also inherent in our existence as rational human beings.

In late modern culture, the Odyssey of rational subjectivity has made a career move from rationalistic epistemology to a more profitable commercial myth, where the protagonist lives the illusionary life of a completely independent individual who thinks of himself as fully in charge: he wants to stay young, on top of it all, and to age successfully (but only after a long, long youth). Equipped with the most recent information that is constantly available in his hand-held media, he assumes he can choose autonomously on the market as the respected client of institutions and organizations that will work according to his choices. In such a culture, where major limitations are not acknowledged, where reality is supposed to be the result of one's own choices or preferences, it can be expected that people who do not age "successfully" will be pushed to the margins of society as unwelcome reminders that the one-sided program of control over life must eventually fail in spite of all advanced technology. We therefore need a more meaningful understanding of aging as living in time to guide our technologically assisted lives while facing up to the human condition of a fundamental lack of control.

Should we then return to premodern narratives about living, aging, and a harmonious cosmos? As we have seen, many of these approaches do contain meaningful narratives about the universe and human lives in it, but they typically regard living in time as a mere repetition of the same eternal patterns: just as the planets turn around the sun and the seasons change, people grow up and die. Whereas late modernity has a tendency to inflate the idea of individual independence, premodern views of a repetitive reality offer little understanding and appreciation of individual uniqueness or of processes of social or cultural *change*. Nor do these approaches to nature allow effective ways to influence natural processes such as senescing or the development of pathologies. In contrast, the modern technologically oriented approach to nature does develop ways to explore and influence the natural environment and bodily processes, but it tends to reduce nature and life to mere material phenomena. Human beings, however, have a hard time seeing themselves and others in this way.

To develop a more meaningful approach to aging, we can turn to those

modern philosophers who were concerned with *personal authenticity* (Taylor 1991). Often, modern thought has been seen as limited to scientific rationality, but the modern interest in subjectivity has not been limited to epistemological foundations; it has also led to strong criticism of these reductionist views and to attempts to gain more meaningful approaches. Although Renaissance authors such as Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) had produced magnificent reflections of personal experiences, including experiences of aging (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming), this essayistic and reflective work was pushed out of sight by the ambitious rationalistic systems of thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, or Hegel until thinking about issues such as personal authenticity became prominent in the work of Romantic authors (Taylor 1989) and nineteenth-century thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.

What can we find in these works that have been pushed to the margins by both system-oriented philosophy and scientific objectivism that can inspire our thinking about aging as living in time? This question leads us back to the premodern, early medieval theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who initiated a neglected but crucially important tradition of articulating personal experiences of living in time, culminating in the work of twentieth-century philosophers such as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and, especially, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), the philosopher of authentic temporal Being, who incorporated many important motifs from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in his major work *Being and Time* (1996).

4.4. The Struggle for a Fuller Experience of Time

Augustine: A Threefold Present

Augustine of Hippo can be seen as one of the first thinkers who posed many profound questions about personal living in time, presented, moreover, in the astonishingly modern form of an autobiography. Although he developed, in his *Of True Religion* (1991), a theory of spiritual development with seven "ages" of inner "celestial" growth, in the present context his *Confessions* (1961), in which he tried to understand his personal experiences of living in time, are more interesting. His perspectives emerge gradually in a critique of Aristotle's view of time as well as that of the Stoics (Meijering 1979; Mesch 2003). He attempts to derive an understanding of time from his own experience and struggles with the question that he or *his living in finite time* has be-

come for himself, thus reframing the Socratic self-questioning in a temporal horizon.

In some ways, Augustine also anticipated the doubtful questioning that would become typical for the early modern citizens who wanted to free themselves from the dark Middle Ages. Indeed, even Descartes' famous statement "I doubt, therefore I am" (*Dubito ergo sum*) can be found more than twelve hundred years earlier in Augustine's work—with the major difference that Augustine does not want to get rid of all doubts. In Book 10 of *On the Trinity,* Augustine notes: "The nature of the mind is to be discovered in what we cannot doubt about ourselves, e.g., that we live, remember, understand, will, think, know and judge" (2002, 39, cf. 53f.). This may sound Cartesian, but the certainty is not inflated to absolutist proportions; it opens many questions and doubts concerning *how* we actually live, remember, understand, or think—or how we *should* do it. Although Augustine's interest is limited to his inner world, since he was convinced that he could find everything that ultimately mattered (such as the Truth and God) only within himself, the explorations of his temporal experience are much more interesting and challenging than anything that might come from Descartes' abstract rationalism.

Some 750 years after Aristotle, Augustine presented a notion of time that can be regarded, in the context of Western thought on time, as the other major position, emphasizing *the personal experience of living in time.* In Aristotle's work, the idea of a personal experience of time is still missing; he acknowledges in passing that the time of nature's movements requires a "soul"—a more contemporary terminology might say an "observer"—to distinguish the instants and count the intervals. He admits that the question of whether time would exist if the soul did not exist "may fairly be asked" (*Physics* 223a.21–22). But his systematic emphasis is on countable numbers instead of on moments that are actually counted as numbers by a human soul. The human experience of time cannot be understood from Aristotle's physical definition of time; it remains largely hidden and unclearly presupposed. This residual role of a presupposed subjective experience of time has remained characteristic of the tradition of chronometric time, which continues to base itself on repetitive movements of nature in spite of the important changes this tradition has undergone since Galileo and Newton.

In Augustine's thought, however, these personal experiences form the center of his thought, and his explorations of a lived experience of time are different from the Greek or Roman approaches, although there are, as usual,

some anticipations of his new approach. His questioning of a lived experience of time opens a fascinating new perspective, inspiring many thinkers after Augustine because time is so common and its forms of measurement so much taken for granted that we seem to need a radically new perspective once we really start to think about it. Augustine's initial puzzlement is expressed in his remark that he knows what time is when nobody asks him, but if this question is really taken seriously, he must admit that he does not know (1961, 264). This has become a famous quotation because in thinking about time we go through the same astonishment as soon as we leave the seeming self-evidence of time behind.

Although time and change are, in Augustine's religious belief, just the experiences of a human creature and nothing of eternal importance, he is overwhelmed by the problems that they present for his personal *existence*. His struggle with time is much more than a mere academic issue: "I have become a problem to myself. For I am not now investigating the tracts of the heavens, or measuring the distance of the stars, or trying to discover how the earth hangs in space. I am investigating myself, my memory, my mind" (1961, 223). Within the context of his Christian faith, he only has his personal experience and its intellectual clarification to rely on. According to traditional skeptical arguments that we find also in the Stoic writings, the existence of time was doubtful, because the past is *no more,* the future is *not yet,* and the present does *not remain*. As Marcus Aurelius would say: "No man is capable of losing either the past or the future; for how can one be deprived of what he has not?" (2005, 29). Of course, such arguments ("the past," "the future," "no more," "not yet" and "does not remain") presuppose already a certain understanding of what "time" is. Unlike the Stoics, Augustine does not seek to live in isolated moments of the present, but to broaden his attention to the *temporal extensions of the present*.

In response to the skeptical arguments, Augustine tried to show that the human soul makes the existence of time possible, because the past exists in the soul's *memory,* the future exists in its *anticipation,* and the present in its *attention*. This idea of a threefold present is Augustine's major contribution to notions of time, still inspiring important twentieth-century philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger.

Comparing Aristotle's and Augustine's views on time is complicated by their different worldviews. For Aristotle, time was not *identical* with the movements of the celestial bodies but could not be *independent* of these movements.

Augustine's Judeo-Christian faith in God the Creator separated him fundamentally from Aristotle's view of nature and his secular perspective on time in spite of his reference to a divine spirit. According to Augustine's belief, the God who created these celestial bodies was also able to stop their movements; therefore, these natural movements could not be fundamental. On the contrary, nature remains a representation of God's creative will. Augustine concluded that God had created the time of nature when he created heaven and earth: "You are the Maker of all time" (1961, 263, 254; cf. 273). But here Augustine introduces a concept of time that goes beyond the time that can be constituted by the human soul.

Although the idea that a God would regulate the movements of stars and planets may have become strange to a secularized mind, we may even in a modern cosmology still accept the idea that the origin of (a particular form of) time is connected with the origin of (a particular) universe. But Augustine's conclusion that God created the time of nature conflicts with his other conclusion, that time could be nothing else than the extension of the human soul (*distentio animi*), ranging from memory to anticipation and that this extension would also grant the possibilities to measure time: "It is in my own mind, then, that I measure time" (1961, 276).

At this point we must conclude that there must be, at least, two different concepts of time. On the one hand, we still have a time that does not depend on personal experiences but transcends these as it ranges from the creation of the world until its end. And on the other hand, we have Augustine's concept of a time that is personally experienced, originating in a soul that extends from the present into the past and the future. We must distinguish these different forms of time without granting one the precedence over the other.

In the early twentieth century the personal or direct experience of (living in) time becomes the center of attention in the intuitive philosophy of Bergson, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, and the existential hermeneutics of Heidegger. They opposed Kant's philosophy of time and maintained that there must be a distinct pre-scientific experience that makes clear, for instance, that "time" is different from "space," which was equally introduced by Kant as a mere presupposition. Their readers must have this same pre-understanding of the differences between time and space, they argued, otherwise they would not know what they were reading about. These philosophies bring us a step further in understanding aging as living in time without reducing time to chronometric measurements.

Bergson: Time as Creativity

In this book I use the word *duration* in the sense of a chronometric assessment of the time that has elapsed between the beginning and end of a particular process; this is close to the meaning of the term as we use it in daily life. However, it would be strongly opposed by the 1928 Nobel laureate Henri Bergson (1859–1941), who used the term *durée* ("duration") to indicate or to evoke the opposite of chronometric time: the inner experience or inner flow of time that knows no spatial distinctions or points as are visible on the face of a clock (Bergson 2010a). Whereas chronometric time would be the realm of rationality, according to Bergson the inner duration would be the domain of intuition, where the true and deep inner being of the person (*le moi profond*) would become confluent with the inner nature of the things it experiences. Bergson is a true follower of Augustine, for whom the truth would reside in the inner domain of human beings; his dualistic philosophy opposes a true inner being to an outer being, which he saw as a superficial rational ego that operates within chronometric time and participates in a world of objectivism. Bergson's "real time" or "duration" is opposed not only to rationality but even to language and aims at an intuitive transcendence of objectivity.

In his metaphysical elaborations, Bergson articulates the experience of losing oneself in activities or experiences: when we have an intense discussion with someone, we forget the time because we were, in a sense, one with the discussion. This way of being completely immersed in encounters with other persons, works of art, or awesome landscapes can clash with the time that we have available or that has been "set apart" for these experiences. We can encounter the difference between these temporal perspectives when we compare the experience of being absorbed in reading a fascinating book versus estimating how long it will take to read it, an estimate that may be necessary to make when one assigns that book to students. However, there is no experience of chronometric time when one is absorbed in a discussion or in reading a brilliant book. The clock is noticed when the discussion is boring, the book is hardly readable, or we have been conditioned to program and monitor our activities according to the clock.

In spite of his dualistic tendencies, Bergson's philosophy of time is important because he has highlighted the ongoing temporal creativity in human consciousness as well as in the evolution (1998; 2010b). Prigogine therefore highly appreciated Bergson's theory because it opened his eyes to the irreversible

creativity of evolution. Prigogine was confronted with a Newtonian theory of physics in which time was absent in the sense that the universe was seen as a static repetition of eternal laws. Against this repetitive form of time, Bergson placed his understanding of time as dynamic, creative, and ever changing.

Prigogine's *From Being to Becoming* (1981) expresses a shift from a Newtonian view of the universe or the reality around us as static and governed by immutable laws to a view of reality as changing and becoming. Chronometric time is essentially a time that is based on repetitiveness, while aging and senescing are phenomena that demonstrate, as we have seen in the first chapter, *changing* realities. It may be possible to establish reliable regularities or statistics in a given context, but these regularities are usually averages of changing outcomes and will change when contexts change. Not only on the evolutionary scale of senescing but also regarding aging as a daily process of living in time, this ongoing change cannot be ignored without illusionary or even detrimental effects. Identities are not static but changing in interaction with changing contexts, and such changes ask for reflection. In the next chapter I will therefore emphasize that narratives about a person's life or identity should not aim for descriptive completeness or definitive portraits but encourage a meaningful reflection of changing identities.

Husserl: The Phenomenological Experience of Time

Husserl's phenomenological approach developed from his wish to reintroduce concrete, direct experience into philosophy instead of a widespread abstract reasoning, which he encountered in his days in the different neo-Kantian schools that invested their intellectual energy in endless conceptual formalization. Husserl saw this as an ongoing sharpening of the knives of analysis until there was no blade left with which to cut. Moreover, he was convinced that psychologistic approaches tended to drain experience of its *essence,* reducing real contents to psychological projections or habits. Therefore he proclaimed a new, "phenomenological" approach to philosophical problems with an emphasis on direct experience of *phenomena:* "To the things themselves" (*Zu den Sachen selbst*). In accordance with this adage, he also wanted to clarify how the *essence* of time (time "as such") could be directly *experienced,* instead of constructing time in a Kantian way as a presupposition.

Within the general program of Husserl's phenomenology, his later work, *Phenomenology of Internal Time-consciousness* (1964), is characterized by an even stronger rigor since he wanted to break away from what he gradually came

to see as a rigid dominance of *perception* in his phenomenological work. He wanted a more direct experiential ("hyletic") relationship to the phenomena, especially to time, in order to lay the foundation for a definitive and truly absolute phenomenology.

Husserl's inspiration in his approach to time is, of course, Augustine, who is mentioned explicitly in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. His *first* important contribution to the theory of time can be seen as a further refinement of Augustine's theory of a threefold present. More precisely, Husserl shows how the experience of something with temporal extension, for instance a long sound, contains not only *actual* listening but also a *retention* of the part that has already sounded and a *protention* of the part to come and its ending as a sound. This configuration of retention, direct experience, and protention can easily be understood when we realize that in listening to a song or a speech, we do not hear isolated sounds. The listener, as well as the singer or speaker, composes melodies, words, and sentences: understandable wholes that are spoken "now." This "now" has a broad temporal extension that can be called the "present." In this present we hear a speech instead of experiencing an internally unrelated series of instants during which there are sounds produced by a voice. Such an experience of the present cannot be obtained from the chronometer, where the human experience of a "now" is lost in a blur of rapidly running microseconds (cf. Hendricks 2001; Hendricks and Peters 1986). Analogous interpretations of such a broad present had been explored before, but Husserl threw a new light on its pre-reflective character and the temporal extension that goes with it.

Husserl's *second* contribution to the philosophy of time that is directly relevant for human aging is his theory of recollection—or rather, re-recollection (*Wiedererinnerung*). In this part of his work he tried to come as far as possible in reconstructing a time that is based on the strength of memory, without relying on chronometric time and its dating system. He shows how impressions that are gathered in the present are memorized and take their place in a temporal order that rests on the ability of consciousness to allow new impressions to enter constantly and to move in front of the older impressions that are still retained. Although he held on too rigidly to the idea of a linear sequence of memories in order to clarify the complex ways in which memories are organized, he succeeded in showing that their organization is partly independent from chronometric time (see 6.2).

This relates to the *third* contribution of Husserl, which is also highly relevant

for aging: the concept that the unity and identity of the subject are constituted by the temporal structure of its consciousness. Thus, in Husserl's later work temporality tends toward the same foundational role for human identity that we will see in the work of his student Heidegger, where time is not just a topic amongst other topics but the most fundamental perspective to understand *being*. We will return to this connection between personal identity and temporality in the next chapter in discussing the meaning of narratives and narrative identity.

Not only the results, but also the problems that are part and parcel of Husserl's approach can be compared to those of Augustine. It remains problematic to accept that the past, especially if it is centuries ago, can be reproduced on the basis of a personal pre-reflective experience of retentions that are added to each other. A long-gone historical past cannot be remembered by an individual consciousness but has to be reconstructed on the basis of documents or other traces of the past. Many analogous questions arise with regard to the temporal dimensions of nature (such as evolutionary processes). Husserl's phenomenology of "internal time consciousness" remains bound to a situation of direct experience not unlike the perception he wanted to distance himself from. But even at this level it is apparently impossible to communicate a direct (hyletic) experience of time without language or concepts, which not only interfere with but also give shape to experience.

Therefore, Husserl's *fourth* contribution to the philosophy of time is a negative one: although he did show that the subjective experience of the present and the subjective organization of memories have temporal qualities of their own, he was unable to constitute the full scope of chronometric time from his internal time consciousness. He has to presuppose the structure of chronometric time, which may be an example of a more general problem concerning the phenomenological reduction (*Einklammerung*): what has been put in parentheses may remain presupposed and even guide the phenomenological analysis. Like Aristotle, Augustine, and Kant before him, Husserl demonstrates unwillingly that *both* chronometric time and a subjectively experienced time must be presupposed and acknowledged. The one cannot take the place of the other: we need to rehabilitate personally experienced time, but this cannot replace chronometric time.

Heidegger: Authentic Temporal Being in the Face of Death

Heidegger breaks with a long tradition, inaugurated by Augustine and still dominating Kant and his own teacher, Edmund Husserl, in which time was

seen as constituted by subjective consciousness. However, his break with this typical emphasis of modern philosophy does not mean that his reflective engagement with time is less intensely personal. His early work, *Being and Time* (*B&T),* published in 1927, is dominated by the Augustinian questions that his existence poses to himself, and he cites his great predecessor: "I labor within myself: I have become to myself a land of trouble and inordinate sweat" (*B&T* 41). Heidegger stresses that it is impossible to think adequately or truthfully about life and living from a perspective that would allow us to study objects outside ourselves. Concepts of time are derived from temporal human existence or "*Da-sein,"* as he calls it: "*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (*B&T* 32).

Heidegger begins with a fundamental distinction that challenges the ways in which human aging can be approached: time can only be understood by human beings, since they alone represent temporal *Being*. So nothing can be said about somebody's temporal being from the outside: to conclude something about a person based on his chronometric age would amount to an insult. To approach temporally living human beings as if they are *things* that would not have their own temporal existence or understanding and could be placed in abstract temporal structures (such as "age") is to reify human beings, treating them as cars, clothes, or other things that can be (dis)qualified from the outside because of their "age." He regards this tendency to forget Being as the fundamental error of all philosophical and scientific approaches to time. Heidegger admired Kant's brilliant analysis of time but Kant also neglected this temporal being of humans, as if time would only be presupposed in the perception of physically objectified processes. So for Heidegger, time is not the epistemological question it had become in the modern philosophy of Descartes, Kant, and even Husserl: Being itself is temporal.

In the analysis of Being, "taking care" (*Sorge*) plays a fundamental role, since it reveals the temporality of human life. This concept of "care" does not mean caring for others but refers to a way of relating to the world and taking care of your life that extends into the past, the present, and the future. Heidegger introduces the temporal structure of care in a rather massive definition that I shall try to explain step by step: "being-ahead-of-oneself -already-being-in (a world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings encountered)" (*B&T* 292). This formula can only be taken apart when we bear in mind that its point is precisely the unity or co-originality of the different temporal exten-

sions. The first part of this definition runs as follows: "being-ahead-of-oneself -already-being-in (a world)." Heidegger begins with "being-ahead-of-oneself," which means that human beings are always already—and inevitably—moving into the future with its possibilities for an authentic human life. However, this openness is influenced by the ways in which somebody has lived before: by "already-being-in (a world)." Authentic openness toward the future is not just forgetting about who we are or have been, because these former ways of Being continue to exert their influence even if we try to break away from the past and want to begin anew. Heidegger emphasizes, however, that the past shows more openness than one would expect. Generally, he argues, both the image of the future and that of the past are approached too abstractly, as if everything would be possible in the future and everything would be unchangeably fixed in the past. However, such perspectives on the future and the past are not adequate for human Being: the future is not abstractly open and the past is not completely closed. Not only does the past exercise its influence, but it contains many possibilities for authentic Being in the future if we know how to let ourselves be re-inspired by challenges that were not met or past prospects that were not yet fulfilled.

This approach to human temporality as a *lived* intertwining of future, past, and present changes fundamentally the understanding of time. Human beings extend their lives in interwoven temporal dimensions; the future, past, and present presuppose each other but cannot be reduced to each other and must properly be understood by a human being, since he or she can only understand what "Being" means. In other words: ontology (the study of Being), that classical philosophical discipline, can only be carried out by human beings who are involved in and concerned about their Being. A philosopher can only try to develop exemplary ways that may show how one can go about this as he uses his own onto-logical possibilities as a human being.

Heidegger warns that his approach should not be interpreted in terms of a traditional perspective on time: "The 'ahead' does not mean the 'before' in the sense of a 'not-yet-now, but later.' Nor does the 'already' mean a 'no-longer-now, but earlier.' If the expressions 'ahead of' and 'already' had *this* temporal meaning, which they can also have, then we would be saying about the temporality of care that it is something that is 'earlier' and 'later,' 'not yet' and 'no longer' at the same time. Then care would be conceived as a being that occurs and elapses 'in time.' The *being* of a being of the nature of Dasein would then turn into *something objectively present*" (*B&T* 301). Human temporality cannot

be identified with a thing that exists "in" or "through" time, because human *existence* is temporal; it "temporalizes" its existence as it extends into the dimensions of the future, past, and present.

For Heidegger, the orientation toward the future is more important than the present because human beings tend to get preoccupied and stuck in the present, where they are confronted with all kinds of distractions that lead away from the authentic future possibilities of existence. According to him, these possibilities only open themselves in the face of death. His understanding of *Being-to-Death* begins with a criticism of inauthentic approaches—almost denials in a psychoanalytical sense—as if death would only strike human beings in general, but not me. According to him statistics about life expectancy and mortality would be part of such inauthenticity; they inform about death in general and do not lead to the realization of my *being* to death. Death remains out there as a subject of study.

According to Heidegger, "Being to Death" can be confronted in an "authentic" and "resolute" *Angst,* which should not be mistaken as *Fear.* Angst is not confronted with an object, but with nothing. "*Angst* can arise authentically only in a resolute Da-sein. He who is resolute knows no fear, but understands the possibility of *Angst* as *the* mood that does not hinder and confuse him. *Angst* frees him from 'null' possibilities and lets him become free *for* authentic ones" (*B&T* 316). However, in a dramatic narrowing of his perspective, Heidegger emphasizes that these authentic possibilities require a heroic distancing from inauthenticity, forcing his concept of Da-sein into a solipsist perspective of the world it finds itself in: "*Angst* individualizes and thus discloses Da-sein as *solus ipse*" (*B&T* 176). Thus, "*death* reveals itself as the *own-most nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed*" (*B&T* 232). Being in the world and being with others are primarily seen as inauthentic: "Da-sein has initially always already fallen away from itself and fallen prey to the 'world.' Fallen prey to the 'world' means being absorbed in being-with-another as it is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity" (*B&T* 164).

In a way, Heidegger's thought represents the culmination of the search for personal authenticity that is also an important motive in modern philosophy (Taylor 1989). Moreover, he makes it clear that living in time is not just an intellectual matter of subjective consciousness; it is an *existential engagement.* But his anticipation of death tends to absorb the spectrum of time, occluding human aging as a temporal process that might be more than a solipsistic and heroic anticipation of one's own death. Being-towards-death becomes the seal

of authentic temporality. This preoccupation with death continues a tradition in which much thought has been devoted to death, while temporal experiences of aging have been neglected. We can still observe this preoccupation in many contemporary discussions about "life expectancies" that might more adequately be called *death* expectancies because they build on the hard facts of death certificates and are hardly informative regarding the kind of life people could expect. Such research presents the extreme opposite of Heidegger's work, since demography is only interested in large numbers and not in *who* dies. Heidegger would see such research, but especially the expectation to live a life of a certain length, as the culmination of inauthenticity in which unknown persons ("they") die and the expectation of my own death is based on statistical chances to die at a certain age. In the last chapter I will bring this intense concern with finite existence more into life as it is lived with *others,* arguing that the finitude of human beings has a much broader meaning than "mortality."

Heidegger's impressive characterization of human life as temporal Being suffers from a dichotomy between personal authentic Being (*Sein*) versus the inauthentic being (*Seiendes*) of other people. This becomes also clear in the second part of the definition of "care": "being-together-with innerwordly beings." To understand this, it is crucial to grasp the difference between the two meanings of "being" that are used in this sentence. In the German original the first "Being" is called *Sein* and the second "being" is called *Seiendes*. The difference between *Sein* and *Seiendes*—which is lost in the English translation—is crucial, because *Sein* refers to Da-Sein, or existence, which is the exclusive quality of humans, whereas *Seiendes* refers just to anything that happens to be around, such as houses, cars, or tools. That other human beings are designated as *Seienden* is therefore problematic and a further example of Heidegger's existential solipsism. The term "encounter" (*Begegnen*) does not upgrade this relating to others because Heidegger also speaks of "encountering" tools. There is no mentioning of the possibility that other *Da-seins* might be encountered who share temporal life and might even be as resolute and authentic as Heidegger's monological Da-sein. The authentic Angst for Death opens *Da-sein* up to a general depreciation of living with others.

We can guess from his discussions of "Being-in-the-world" that the world in which we live has some importance, but Heidegger's emphasis on his own almost exclusive authenticity distorts the world in its social and historical dimensions. The struggle for authentic Being-in-the-world is situated in a

negatively evaluated social context in which other people mainly enter his perspective as inauthentic. Social life, or in Heidegger's terms "Being-with" (*Mitsein*), is practically identified with the prototype of inauthenticity: "They" (*das Man*). We find a basic contradiction here: according to Heidegger, his philosophical analysis must be verified by the concreteness of everyday life, but this is mainly a sphere of inauthenticity. His preoccupation with death prohibits an adequate understanding of the social horizon that makes Heidegger's analysis (which also leans heavily on language, an eminently social phenomenon) possible. This criticism of Heidegger was voiced early on—not loudly but clearly—by his student Karl Löwith (1928) and has been elaborated many years later by philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas (1980; 1990) and Michael Theunissen (1986).

Time Is Lived in Constitutive Life Worlds

In their opposition to chronometric objectivism, the philosophers of lived time usually show a strong *subjectivist* tendency. Heidegger's existential analysis as well as Husserl's differentiations of Augustine's reflections about a lived present with its memories (*retentions*) and anticipations (*protentions*) remain monological constructs. I have already discussed this in the case of Heidegger's work, but also in Husserl's phenomenological analysis of temporal experience the focus is on the "inner time consciousness" of the individual subject, who hears a sound in its temporal extension or remembers experiences from his past. Behind this typically modern opposition of subjectivism versus objectivism still lurks the dominance of the "rational subject." Although Husserl wanted to distance himself from the modern program of a mathematically-founded scientific approach to nature and tried to stay as closely as possible to direct human experiences, he still clung to the Cartesian idea of the autonomous rational subject who thinks in order to be able to constitute "the world." This illusion also tends to neglect the human body, which can suddenly remind us that we do not constitute our bodies but are dependent on them, even in our most lucid moments. In spite of his radical critique of the modern philosophy of consciousness, even Heidegger continued the Cartesian negligence of the constitutive importance of the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962) that must be acknowledged by *including* senescing in a broad concept of human aging, not by reducing human aging to senescing.

Moreover, living in time and thinking about it presuppose the experiences and thoughts of others, historical as well as contemporary, and articulating

personal experiences of time presupposes cultures that have interpreted and organized time in specific ways. As they grow up, children acquire specific temporal distinctions enabling them to experience and articulate their living in time (cf. Dittmann-Kohli 2007). We may have lost a meaningful and harmonious cosmos, but that does not mean that we live in isolation from others; lived time is also a *social* and *communicative* process. Husserl's monological analysis of temporal experience contrasts strongly with an important innovation in his late thought that came from his persistent radical questioning: the constitutive *life world* (Baars, forthcoming). However, the implications of this idea of a constitutive social life world were not elaborated by Husserl, but by his student, Alfred Schütz. In Schütz's conception, social being and temporal being are interrelated because living together means that "we are growing old together" (1967, 163). The *temporal deepening* that took place in Husserl's analysis of the present must therefore be combined with its *social extension.*

Not only is our experience of the present charged with references to our own (very close or remote) past and future, as in remembering our plans, we are also confronted with the remembered pasts and anticipated futures of other people around us. The plans, memories, and actual experiences of children interact and interfere with the plans, memories, and actual experiences that their parents have regarding their own lives and those of their children. We see how these interacting temporal perspectives quickly become very complicated as more people enter the scene and as they change over time. They are all, indeed, "growing older together," but in many different ways, constituting a complex *intergenerational* time perspective that forms an important temporal context for human aging (see also 6.3).

Conclusions

Chronometric approaches to the world, to life, and aging have their historical roots in perspectives that regard the universe as a meaningful cosmos: eternally repeating itself in patterns ranging from astrological phases to seasons, which were seen as meaningful orientations for the micro-cosmoses in which people led their lives. Modern chronometric time, however, owes its increasing *exactness* to its methodical search for repetitive processes in nature with the highest frequencies, such as atomic oscillations. This means that repetitive natural processes are still foundational but have been depleted of any meaningful content. This abstract chronometric time has been combined

with an understanding of scientific *objectivity* that was developed in Newtonian cosmology, which has strengthened the abstract character of this understanding of time even more. Another aspect that shows how far these physical approaches to time are distanced from temporal experiences of persons who are living in time is its theoretically argued reversibility. In the debates on the reversibility or irreversibility (*anisotropy*) of time, physics has been challenged by scientific disciplines that focus less on dead nature and more on thermodynamics or biology in a broad sense. However, although a concept of irreversible time agrees more with our everyday intuitions, these perspectives do little to bring living in time closer to human experiences. But this is only a problem when we want to hold on to *one* approach to time; a more fruitful way would be to develop perspectives that can do more justice to temporal experiences that cannot be grasped by chronometric approaches.

One of the lessons that can be learned from the foregoing analysis is that it makes no sense to oppose chronometric time to a subjectively experienced time and to declare the other as a derivative or secondary approach to time. In their opposition against the dominance of chronometric time, Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger, like many other thinkers about lived time, are too eager in altogether discarding chronometric time or seeing it as a derivative of personal experience. Heidegger's criticism of the "ordinary" or "vulgar" (*vulgäre*) concept of time does not even distinguish between everyday time and scientific concepts of time: both would only have validity as derivations of authentic temporality. However, living in time also implies a confrontation with phenomena and dimensions that cannot be derived from personal existence or be fully grasped within the dimensions of personal experience, such as the evolution of *homo sapiens,* our brains, the earth, or the solar system. The human condition implies also that we are corporeal beings, taking part in and depending on many constitutive natural processes. Constructionist critiques are rightly pointing out that the ways in which scientific research proceeds are always socially constructed; however, we are not aging and senescing because we have theories or institutes of aging. Although impossible to understand without theoretical constructions, these processes are always more than just the constructions by which we understand and communicate about them. In this "more" lies also the possibility of corroborating, falsifying, or correcting theoretical constructions or parts of them.

The importance of social and existential dimensions does not imply that natural processes do not have their ontological momentum, however modifi-

able. In spite of all efforts to control some of nature's processes, we are still part of nature, although not in the same way as plants: we *know* that we are living in finite time (see 6.3). Living and aging authentically does not mean that bodily processes of senescing are not important or that they should not be studied with scientific methods, including chronometric measurements, but aging should not be *reduced* to these objectifications.

For temporal experience, chronometric time has little to offer apart from the temporal coordination of our actions and determining *when* something occurred, *how long* it lasted, and whether it was *earlier or later* relative to other phenomena. Personal perspectives of lived time and chronometric measurements are qualitatively different temporal perspectives. Chronometric time, on the one hand, and the forms of experiential time, on the other hand, cannot be *derived* from each other, nor do they *exclude* each other; they rather *presuppose* each other.

With the expression "living in time," I also intend to say that time must be seen as an enveloping and elusive dimension that escapes pretensions in order to grasp it completely. What we call "time" is merely a general term for a quasi-totality (like "nature," "life," or" world") that cannot be approached directly or grasped as a whole but manifests itself in a pluriformity of phenomena and processes that require different approaches. In other words, we need science, the humanities, and the voices of aging persons to understand human aging, because as we are aging, we are living in different times. A more subtle culture of aging would acknowledge these different temporal perspectives that are occluded by the identification of time as such with chronometric time. This is not a mere intellectual matter: our way of living suffers if we allow chronometric time to dominate our lives. What we are facing is a *cultural* problem, a question of how we want to approach living in time and the possible meanings of aging. We must develop different temporal perspectives to deepen our understanding of what it may mean to live in time to correct and counterbalance the under-reflected overemphasis on chronometric time and age.

The dominant program of modernity to be able to control "the world" or "life" by discovering their causal laws has not led to the perfect control or omnipotence Descartes dreamed of, but it produced and still produces impressive results in dealing effectively with specific problems. The problems that have emerged with respect to these developments are problems of controlling—or, rather, leading these instrumental processes in desirable directions. Descartes

assumed that the control over nature would raise no further questions regarding the ways to lead this instrumental control over (some of) nature's processes. Technological achievements, however advanced, remain instrumental, and instruments must be put to good use; in themselves, they are just blind tools.

Along the way of modernity, the position of human beings has changed dramatically. Instead of being respected as the foundation of knowledge, its *subiectum,* human beings became a mere *subject matter* of science. However, more technological control over life, including processes of senescing, does not in itself lead to a *good life,* which was the ideal of the classical Greek and Roman culture. Although premodern cultures were quite helpless in the face of many problems that can be solved nowadays, these technological capacities still have to be integrated in a culture of a good life including *arts of aging*. This means, paradoxically, that the inability to control life in all its aspects, including the most vital ones, must be acknowledged in order to avoid the illusion of the independent, autonomous individual who tends to see and respect only forms of human life that are "successful."

To prepare the ground for a more adequate perspective, I returned in this chapter to a tradition within modernity that has strongly opposed its main tendency to reduce scholarly activities to science and to approach human beings as mere objects. In the context of this book, authors who have focused on a better understanding of human lives as living in time, such as the early medieval thinker Augustine of Hippo and the twentieth-century philosophers Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger, are especially of interest. Their thoughts were explored to gain a richer understanding of lived time: experiencing the present in its deep connections with the past and the future. We have also seen, however, that the opposition has resulted in a dichotomy in which the idea that chronometric time would be the only "real" time was opposed by constructions in which chronometric time was presented as derived from a more fundamental lived time or even as an inauthentic form of time. This does no justice to the important role chronometric time has to play in scientific investigations and in coordinating interactions. Lived time and chronometric time cannot be derived from each other, nor do they exclude each other; they rather *presuppose* each other and deserve a proper place in a culture that respects the pluriform richness of living in time.

In response to Heidegger's overemphasis on death, I would like to introduce yet another face of finite living: time as hope. When Emmanuel Levinas

held his last lectures at the university (Levinas 2000), he chose the philosophy of Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) as a main subject because, according to Levinas, Western philosophy of time had basically been a philosophy of death. He appreciated Bloch's thinking about time as a narrative of hope and future. Instead of being preoccupied with death, Bloch emphasized hope as the most basic domain or message of time. For Bloch, hope also had critical potential as the anticipation of being freed from oppression, something he expressed sometimes in a rather naive Marxist terminology that may seem to make his work outdated. But Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1995) is actually a fascinating philosophy of culture dealing with a variety of subjects such as fairy tales, music, myths, and art as well as philosophical subjects such as time and hope.

According to Bloch, living in time implies encountering new possibilities or challenges, not a repetition of another day or another year, like Hannah Arendt's thinking about *natality* that we will encounter in the last chapter. Here, it is not the confrontation with death that would confront us with our innermost authentic possibilities, as Heidegger would have it, but the confrontation with hope and transcendence of existing situations, especially when they are situations of unnecessary suffering and violence. In looking at the past and the present, we feel that what we have done is not yet complete and is far from perfect; there is a kind of restlessness and longing for something that would be better but isn't there yet.

According to Bloch, we must learn to be hopeful because hope opens the time that tends to repeat itself; death is not the last word as long as our hope can reach beyond death toward a better future. And when we are dead, what we have not been able to achieve will remain alive as a hope that other human beings in the future can again make theirs.

But Heidegger still has a powerful message: in his search for authentic temporal living, he emphasized that being human implies "ontological competence." He would have been shocked or enraged if somebody pretended to know anything about other people's being because of their age. Approaches that categorize aging from the outside neglect that humans are not dead material but have their own experiences of temporal living. Such emphasis on listening to the voices of aging human beings, instead of just measuring their characteristics and establishing how many of them exist and what ages they have, is the first reason for the main topic of the next chapter, the meaning of narratives. A second reason is that it adds an important aspect of aging as living in time: its character of being shared in life worlds, an aspect that was ne-

glected in the main approaches to time discussed in this chapter. A third reason to include narratives is the fundamental importance of lived time for personal identity, a point that was emphasized by Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger but began only to be explored later in connection with narratives by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricoeur. What we tend to think of as our *selves* has a lot to do with the ability to situate our lives in the interrelated temporal dimensions of the present, remembered pasts, and anticipated futures—something that includes but cannot be reduced to chronometric time.

5

Aging and Narrative Identities

> The river of time is a river sweeping its banks along with it.
>
> ROBERT MUSIL, *THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES*

Introduction

In late modern societies people are called "aged" as soon as their chronometric age reaches a certain mark. This may be the official retirement age or the age at which the organizations that serve the interests of older people, such as the AARP or its European counterparts, announce the onset of aging, usually at the age of fifty. To assess whether individuals are still normal adults or already "aged," the chronocratic culture demands to know the year of birth, but this hard fact can only serve its purpose if it is implicitly loaded with generalizing images and prejudices. To say that somebody is 48, 57, 68, or 82 can only be seen as informative if one draws on a certain construction of the life course in which ages are connected with assumptions about characteristics of persons. Such assumptions are usually related to narratives about the life course.

What are the consequences of such chronometrically ascribed identities for the ways persons see themselves? In other words, for their personal identities? Are "normal" people suddenly overtaken by a new collective identity when the clock ticks them out of normal adulthood? Will there be repeated shifts into yet another, still "older" identity when they become 85+ or 100+? Or is

the self ageless (Kaufman 1986)? Do aging persons remain who they were, even during relatively long lives? Is it possible to support personal identities of aging persons in such a way that they are better able to deal with generalizing "cultural macro-narratives" (Baars 2010)? How can we do more justice to aging persons?

In scientific studies of adult aging, the research aims at explaining how certain characteristics such as income, health, or well-being evolve and change over time. Remarkably, such characteristics are distinguished from the *identities* of the persons who form the research populations. Somehow, their identities are supposed to form a continuous background; if not, we would speak, not of change or aging, but of two or more different persons. This implicit "background identity" presupposes that aging persons form a continuous, unchanging background of the search for specific changes in biological, psychological, or social variables—mostly in disciplines not related to each other—although the sheer amount of change in such variables over a lifetime undermines the idea of such a simple continuity. Indeed, it is not easy to grasp the complexity of *aging identities,* which may be one of the reasons that age-related generalizations are so popular.

In the context of scientific research, background identities tend to be empty references to specific respondents: mere *identifications*. This fits well into the culture of late modern societies, where questions of "identity" are drastically simplified and "solved" by methods of identification that are legitimated by nation states, providing their citizens with identity cards and listing them in the data banks from which large-scale empirical studies usually derive their research populations. While traditional methods to assess the identity of a person focused on directly visible characteristics such as height, face, and color of the eyes and hair, the possibilities for changing such characteristics have made identification more abstract. Now it focuses on characteristics that can only be verified by expert technology such as fingerprints, iris pattern, or DNA. Even when a person changes his or her appearance completely, including a change of sex, this will not affect this identification. Whereas philosophers and theologians have thought for ages that there is a meaningful and unique human essence behind appearances, this essence has evaporated in the bureaucracies that keep track of individuals through their numbered identities, such as social security numbers, instead of their names. As is so often true, exact procedures are gained at the expense of meaningful content: these methods of identification address technically identifiable bodies and not personal identi-

ties. Therefore, these advanced technological methods represent not the end but the beginning of a more thorough questioning of what a *personal* identity might be, without assuming that this identity remains static over time. Sometimes it seems clear that we change, but do we *really* change? At other times it appears that we remain the same persons as we age, but do we *really* remain "ourselves"?

One of the ways to develop a more meaningful culture of aging, that is, a culture with more respect for the personal identity of aging individuals, would be to pay more attention to the different stories that emerge from their reflected experiences. To do this, it will be necessary to attain more clarity about the role narratives can play and to reflect on such ideas as "life stories" and "(auto)biographies" that are too often taken for granted. I also discuss in this chapter some other important issues concerning narrative approaches such as "narrative identity," the role of *integration* or *coherence* in narratives, the role of *textual* elements, and the importance of narrative *practices*.

5.1. Embedding Aging in Narratives

Even in late modern life worlds, experiences of aging, memories of the past, and visions of the future are expressed in narratives. If we want to communicate what is important in our own lives and that of others and why, we usually do so by a telling a story. The ways in which stories are told may have changed from sitting together around a fire to reaching out across cultures by Internet, but the basic activity has not changed although the textual elements have become more complicated by the use of pictures, movies, and audiovisual designs. We still communicate with others by telling how we experienced certain periods or situations, what we did, what we went through, how we are doing now, and what we expect of the future. By telling these stories we try to get a more thorough understanding of what has been happening to us. Stories seem to grow so directly out of our actions and experiences that it can sometimes appear as if we are part of a developing story. We also know that people can have a strong need to communicate their experiences to others, to be able to tell their story and be heard. If there are cultural universals at all, one of them might be communicating temporal experiences, either short episodes or longer periods, in the form of stories (Brown 1991). This strong connection between human activity and stories was already observed by Aristotle when he stated that narrative is the imitation of action (*mimesis praxeos*). Through

stories, we communicate to others and clarify for them and ourselves what it is to age, how we have been, or what is happening to us now.

One of the remarkable aspects of narratives is their ability to integrate in a loose but potentially meaningful way the most diverse events, actions, and their evaluations. Through the plot, *events* and *story* are connected reciprocally, so that the story changes when other events or interpretations are introduced and vice versa. This implies that the same events can be integrated into different stories, where the elements are arranged differently with other emphases or from other points of view. Events that play an important role in people's lives are rarely unambiguous facts. On the contrary, they are usually complexly interrelated configurations of various situations, intentions, acts, and experiences. The fact that there are different stories of the same event cannot simply be attributed to a lack of precision, as it might seem from the point of view of methodically controlled intersubjectivity. Different stories may very meticulously express the potential richness of situations, experiences, and evaluations.

Here also, chronometric time will play a role, but only a modest one. If we were to ask somebody what a visit or a long period of work was like, it would be surprising (and boring) if this person would give us a chronometrically detailed list of events. Chronometric measurement does not give a clue about *what* we should report, because we might measure anything. Just as scientific research requires theories to develop a relevant structure in the face of an immense universe of facts or observations, the life world requires narratives to play this role of structuring and articulating meaning.

As soon as we have a plot, the *chronometric* dimension (where the emphasis falls on the timing and succession of events) can be included in the narrative along with personal experiences. In every story, there is a succession of events (we cannot fly somewhere without going to an airport first), and their exact timing may be important as well, so narrative time does not exclude chronometric time. But what is emphasized and told in the story depends on its meaningful configuration: chronometric exactness is not important per se, but for reasons following from the plot. A narrative can run parallel to clock time, which may suddenly surface when the story tells that a person came too late or too early, so the integrative capacity of narratives does not imply that it can replace chronometric time. But the narrative does not adhere to clock time. In everyday life there is day and night, and there are hours, minutes, and seconds, but it would be odd to assess them exactly for no apparent reason,

unless the ticking of the clock has come to control life. Chronometric measurement may become important in a story when somebody did not show up at the agreed time (for reasons which may be told subsequently), or to emphasize a certain characteristic of the person ("he is always late" or "she is always punctual").

As far as our memories reach back in history, narratives have been the medium of sharing experiences of human lives in all their diversity. Alasdair MacIntyre even exclaims that "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (1981, 216; cf. Sandel 1996; Taylor 1989). As Ricoeur remarks, there is no "living in time" or "temporal being" without narrative: they are "as closely linked as a 'language-game' in Wittgenstein's terms is to a 'form of life.' . . . Narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality or temporal being is brought to language" (Ricoeur 1999, 91).

Narratives and Narrative Identity

Although being born, growing up, aging, and dying are very common "processes," they are also the most particular experiences because they never take place in general; they always concern specific persons and specific circumstances. Much of the meaning inherent in such specific experiences is lost in quantifying perspectives aimed at establishing probabilities and averages. By contrast, stories can articulate such meanings and can support and strengthen aging identities. The constitutive importance of narratives for *identities* is supported by recent developments in philosophy and the humanities. This "narrative turn" is part of a long tradition that has tried to counterbalance not so much the presence but the dominance of quantifying methods (Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Chr. Nash 1990). From a narrative approach to aging more light can be shed on its rich pluriformity; therefore, there has been a growing interest in narrative approaches to aging in which aging persons are not merely subjected to tests and questionnaires but are allowed and even encouraged to speak about their lives (Birren and Cochran 2001; Birren and Deutchmann 1999; Kenyon, Clark, and De Vries 2001; Randall and Kenyon 2001).

Several authors have pointed out the importance of a "narrative identity" in clarifying the meaning of a personal identity. According to these theories, an essential part of the understanding of someone's individuality and the uniqueness of his or her life is formed by stories from and about that person, stories that articulate the identity beyond mentioning a name: "This is Peter."

The importance of such a narrative identity is corroborated in daily experience. If we ask what kind of person somebody is or has been, what kind of life they lead or have led, the answers come in the form of stories (Arendt 1958; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). And if we do not believe a certain story or think it is not correct because our own experiences with that person are different, we tell another story.

But many new questions arise as soon as narratives are introduced: how important are narratives and in what way?

Narrative Integration as a "Good Life"

In this section I will discuss a narrative philosophy that maintains that narratives are of fundamental importance and could even offer a remedy for the moral poverty of modernity that has evolved in spite of its instrumental richness. If that proposal would prove to be viable or convincing, this would help to find a more meaningful place for aging in the late modern life course. This revitalization of narrative follows a diagnosis of impoverishment: not only have shared traditions fallen apart in late modernity so that there is no integrated way of life anymore, but from the beginning there has been a strong tendency in modernity to leave the Greek project of "a good life" behind in its focus on having more control over life. Even where control has been successful it does not generate a meaningful life, although late modern culture advertises a successful life of spending. Faced with this historical diagnosis, there has been a strong interest among several authors to return to premodern sources. A general characteristic of this renewed interest in premodern Greek and Roman sources has been a tendency to emphasize the importance of "aesthetic" qualities, as derived from the classical meaning of *aisthesis* (sensitivity), to re-sensitize late modern culture to appreciate again what "a good life" might be (see 6.2). This means that the boundaries between aesthetics, ethics, or morality are contested and that the question of what a good life may be leads to taking up an "art of life" that is inspired by the idea of narrative integration. Although these thinkers hardly ever speak about aging, I intend to follow them with respect to the possible meaning of their philosophies of a good life for an art of aging.

Both Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor have proposed that it would be possible to reintroduce the Greek idea of a "good life," to remedy the loss of a unified way of life in the many scattered and fragmented lifestyles of late modern society. MacIntyre, especially, returns to the idea of Aristotle already

discussed that the quality of a life cannot be established in a moment but takes a whole life: "For one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day. Neither does one day or a short time make somebody blessed and happy" (*NE* 1098a19). MacIntyre reinterprets this idea as the possibility of leading a virtuous life, in the form of a *narratively integrated* or *coherent* life. In spite of the many differences in lifestyles, situations, and circumstances, such an integrated narrative would enable us to approach moral issues regarding motive, intention, and responsibility. MacIntyre maintains that questions such as "what have I done?" or "what *should* I do?" can only be answered against the background of some knowledge of "*who I am*" and that such a self-identity can only be articulated in a life story. He advocates "a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to death as narrative beginning to middle to end" (MacIntyre 1981, 205). This unified narrative is meant as an alternative for the modern disintegration of the life course and aims to include "both childhood and old age that have in modernity been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms" (204). Speaking of "subjects of whom stories can be told" (218) would presuppose unified life stories.

MacIntyre's approach has been supported and elaborated by other thinkers such as Charles Taylor, who has also claimed that a basic condition of making sense of ourselves would be that we grasp our lives in a unified narrative: "Our lives exist . . . in this space of questions, which *only* a coherent narrative can answer. In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become" (Taylor 1989, 47; cf. Dennett 1992). In this respect, MacIntyre and Taylor are genuine hermeneutical philosophers, stating that we cannot determine our identities "just by ourselves," for we have always already been formed by traditions that were there long before we were born. This basic position was articulated well in Gadamer's major work *Truth and Method* (2005), in which he emphasized that somebody always finds himself already as part of a tradition whether he is aware of this and likes it or not. One can only tell and reflect about one's life story, if one has learned a language and acquired ways of articulating experiences. In this sense, it is impossible to pinpoint exactly where our stories begin. We cannot begin to tell our stories at the moment of birth; the awareness of being born and stories about it are only possible afterwards and presuppose the mastering of profound cultural abilities such as learning a language.

Such abilities, in their turn, are embedded in the master stories that were

there long before any of us was born, such as Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism; more secular versions like Humanism, "Capitalist Progress," or "The Free West"; or stories about the country, the region, or the family one was born into. Inevitably, stories and histories will mold persons to a certain extent, as do the language or languages we have learned to speak. Of course, being embedded in traditions is not the same as agreeing with them. A critical confrontation with certain traditions only makes sense if they matter, not if they are completely irrelevant. In this context, Charles Larmore (1987) speaks of a "modus vivendi": a recognition of being influenced by a tradition without resulting in conformity.

So far, MacIntyre's perspective is clear: I cannot choose who I am from scratch, as if I were a mere *tabula rasa,* because I must first learn ways of communicating, in a broad sense, that will be understood by others. Part of discovering who I am means reflecting on the traditions or stories that formed me and enabled me to think about my life. However, MacIntyre approaches these issues as if we were only passive recipients. W. Kymlicka is right when he says that for MacIntyre, the relevant question is not "What should I be, what sort of life should I lead?" but "Who am I?" The self " 'comes by' its ends, not 'by choice' but 'by discovery' " (1991, 53).

The process of articulating one's identity must, however, be more creative than MacIntyre assumes; it cannot just be a matter of *finding* who I am. MacIntyre's task of discovery requires a lot of creativity and work to lead to clear results; our synthesizing capacities are challenged even more when we realize that many impressive stories have formed us. Europeans, for instance, would have difficulty finding one integrated tradition during the last millennium or even earlier. European history has constantly been challenged and enriched by other traditions such as Muslim traditions or those encountered later during the colonizations. So it is not clear where I would have to search to find the tradition that has formed me; certainly there would be more than one. As globalization continues, it will be harder to find clearly demarcated traditions. Therefore, one must inevitably select and assume some responsibility for the selection, especially if it should add up to a *unified* narrative.

According to MacIntyre and Taylor, such a unified narrative would not only be indispensable to understand our formative history but also to guide us into the future. "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion how we have become, and of where we are going" in order to attain a *good* life: "because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus deter-

mine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest.' " (Taylor 1989, 47; 51ff.).

MacIntyre and Taylor reintroduce the idea of life as a *journey,* which can already be found in some of the oldest stories known to us, such as the Homeric *Odyssey,* the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, or the biblical story of wandering through the desert in order to find the "promised land." Both authors refer to the medieval conception of a *quest,* which is not a search for something that is already known such as gold or oil but for something unknown: "It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge" (MacIntyre 1981, 219). MacIntyre insists that a *unified* narrative would not only be crucial to discovering or maintaining a "self," but it would also be decisive regarding a *good* life: "[To ask]'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion" (218ff.).

Here, some critical questions have to be raised again. Why should the self reside in the *unity* of the narrative? Usually, "life stories" are about specific periods or situations and originate in response to questions. Not only are such stories influenced by the situations in which they are told, but the listeners with their questions and other responses also contribute to the ways stories are told. Moreover, in the process of telling stories, new perspectives may suddenly appear and give rise to unexpected turns and changing evaluations of situations and persons. If it is a written story of somebody's life, the imagined audience will play a constitutive role and the responses of the readers will raise new questions. All these possible interruptions and reflections will hardly lead to an integrated life story (cf. Thomä 1998).

Moreover, how can I bring the unity of my life to *completion?* Especially when our lives are supposed to be represented in a narrative, it is unlikely that we can complete this. Even when people are speaking about the life of somebody who has already died, they are still contributing to the stories about this person's life. Not only my death but also my birth are part of the lives and the stories of others who were there when I was born or who will survive my death. In both cases it appears to be impossible to complete our own lives or to complete the story about somebody else's life. The stories about persons

who have inaugurated inspiring traditions not only with their lives but also with their deaths, such as Socrates or Jesus Christ, are still changing the meanings of these lives, even after more than two millennia. Moreover, we can see in contemporary history how stories about someone's death continue to contribute to the meaning of his or her life: think of John F. Kennedy or Lady Di. Even stories about "ordinary" people are not completed; they just fade away when nobody is interested anymore.

But MacIntyre continues: "To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is . . . to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life" (1981, 217). Of course, this depends on what MacIntyre means by being "accountable"; but if this meaning comes close to "responsibility"—and I assume it does—such a responsibility can only be expected regarding specific actions. Usually this would be the way in which others may hold me responsible because I did, or failed to do, something *specific:* for instance, I forgot to lock the door, or I caused an accident. But how can I be held responsible or accountable for *my life?* So many "things" happen during a long life, and each life is so strongly interconnected with the lives of others that it appears to be impossible to be accountable not only for my actions but also for my experiences. Of course, I can be held responsible for certain personal decisions, but am I responsible for *meeting* my wife (which is not the same as marrying her) or for meeting my friends or not meeting other persons? Can I be held responsible for my experiences that may be dominated by periods of war, peace, prosperity, or crisis that profoundly influence "the story of my life"? Am I accountable for having remained healthy? And even when I can decide, the most important decisions in life are made without knowing how "life" and "the world" will be in one year, let alone in twenty-five years. Here, MacIntyre is surprisingly modernistic: although he wants to transcend the limitations of modernity, he has followed a dominant modern way of thinking about human life that has also become strong in commercial notions such as the "self-made man" who has made a fortune or has had an impressive career because he has made all the right choices.

Life Plans

Modernity has developed its own convictions, and one of them is the idea that lives should ideally or even essentially be seen as the linear developmental process of an individual progressing to higher and higher levels. Classic examples of this model are the European *Bildungsroman* and biographies of

successful persons. Even in recent thought "rational life plans" still play an important role. According to John Rawls, the answer to the question of what a good life might be for a particular person can only be answered by making a rational life plan. By describing his or her intentions for life, the person would also make clear who he or she is: "A person's good is determined by what is for him the most rational long-term plan of life given reasonably favorable circumstances" (Rawls 1971, 92; cf. Royce 1908, 78). Does this mean that it is possible to draw up an all-embracing and sound plan for one's life and that needs or wishes do not change during such a time span? According to Rawls, this is indeed the case with a rational life plan. When a person carries out this plan, the result cannot be that he or she would like to have done something else; if the life plan is not satisfying, the person is to blame: "Now one feature of a rational plan is that in carrying it out the individual does not change his mind and wish that he had done something else instead" (1971, 421).

This rather abstract construction is open to the objection that it is impossible to foresee how needs or preferences may change in the course of time and, moreover, that such changes are not necessarily a sign of irrationality. After all, a substantial part of life plans consists of the wish to explore or investigate horizons we do not yet know but that appear interesting or important to us at a given moment. In his book *Moral Luck,* Bernard Williams (1981) proposes the more viable perspective of "constitutive projects" in human lives: major commitments and attachments that carry us into the future with a reason for living. Such projects can be articulated as comprehensive rational plans (if one likes to do that), but they may also be held more open, as inspiring perspectives that guide us into unexplored but exciting future situations. When deciding to commit ourselves to a fascinating study or a challenging job, we do not know how far these prospects actually coincide with the future reality, but this does not prevent us from being excited. Something similar occurs when planning a journey or even when committing ourselves to a personal relationship: what attracts us is still largely unknown, but it looks interesting, important, or exciting, and this is what we may explore or develop. Not all that seems worthwhile turns out to be that way, but we cannot know how the future will be. Even if we plan the same journey again, we can hardly expect that everything will be exactly the same. Thus, even in planning activities, which is only a part of our relation to the future, the unknown plays an essential role, and life is only partially determined by what we once decided to do. Interestingly, in an interview on the occasion of his 88th birthday, Isaiah

Berlin emphasized that he had "never aimed at anything. I didn't shape my life. I simply did one thing after another. When opportunities arose, I took them. It's an unplanned life, essentially" (in Thomä 1998, 76).

Rawls, however, assumes that the more his or her rationally planned aims in life have been realized, the happier the person will be: "A man is happy when he is more or less successfully in the way of carrying out this plan" (1971, 93). He refers to the classical view of Aristotle that the satisfaction and the pleasure people experience during their lives depend on the most optimally differentiated development of their talents. The more these are developed, the greater the satisfaction (*NE* VII and X). This kind of thinking about development has been strongly advocated throughout history, although it overemphasizes one view of development: the unfolding of more or less fixed innate personal talents. In this one-sided view, other people are seen as an environment that is used for the autonomous development of one's talents without being influenced by them. Cultures differ, however, in what counts as "talents," and other people influence the conditions for the development of one's talents in educating, challenging, or frustrating them. Moreover, happiness involves more than success in the realization of one's rational plans: happiness has been reduced here to the experience that a plan has worked and has produced the results that were aimed at. Of course, if a plan works out well, this will give some satisfaction, depending on the sort of plan we are thinking of. But happiness also depends on what happens to us unexpectedly, such as an unforgettable meeting with a person or an overwhelming encounter with a work of art or with humbling natural phenomena.

The human capacity to *plan* happiness successfully strikes me as being quite limited compared to the more impressive capacities to prevent it from happening. We can try to prepare the ground for happiness to flower: if we are not open to meeting people, it will be difficult to be touched by them; if we don't go to a museum or concert hall, we will not easily be moved by a work of art. But meeting many people is not in itself gratifying, and going to a museum or a concert will not guarantee that we will experience a work of art that moves us. Being dedicated to a personal relationship does not guarantee that it will last and continue to make us happy, although indifference may be effective in preventing it from happening. We can be *satisfied* when we reach a goal, although that can already be a problem in a culture of restless dynamism. But is this what we mean by "happiness"? This depends, of course, on what we

mean by happiness, a subject we cannot explore any further in this context, but we may want to broaden it beyond "success" in planning specific projects. To experience happiness, efforts are often necessary, but they are rarely sufficient in themselves. Happiness can also be seen as a state of life that exceeds our plans and expectations unexpectedly (Seel 1995).

As people are aging, they learn some lessons that may be difficult to explain to younger persons. One of these is that life does not (fortunately or unfortunately) go according to plans. This does not imply that we should give up making plans, because these may clarify our preferences, wishes, and intentions, but the major plans that were made in the past usually show the marginality of attempts to control or predict the future. This can also be seen at the larger scale of institutions, organizations, and societies: their plans don't work and are usually short-term ways of dealing with unexpected crises. This presents another reason to put chronometric time, which forms the statistical foundation of many plans great or small, in a broader temporal perspective. In making use of chronometric time, we should remain open to the wealth of unexpected turns—for instance, the qualities and opportunities of specific situations and special "times" in the sense of a *Kairos* (see 6.2).

Margaret Urban Walker (see 1.3) has criticized the tradition of thinking about life in terms of a linear development as an idealization of what Michael Walzer (1994) has called a "career self," whereas the lives of many women would be characterized by the maintenance of diverse relationships that cannot be unified into one life story or life plan (Walker 1998; cf. Bauman 1995). Instead of being seen as cumulative careers, women's lives should be seen as constellations of changing relationships, families, enterprises, and projects that are larger than an individual life. Consequently, instead of a linear integration, Walker speaks of a "lateral integration of life," a conception that "supports the idea of individual meaning and responsibility but finds it in connections that enrich but transcend individuals" (Walker 1999, 107). Here, narratives tend to become rather episodic and discontinuous, but more strongly interconnected with other narratives, articulating the extension of selves beyond themselves and the integration of selves into lives and collective experiences rather than the self-maintaining continuity of a career self.

In many current ways of understanding aging we can, however, still recognize the idealized linear development in the form of a culminating career, followed by a similarly linear decline or just a loss of "normal" life, unless

the progress narrative is continued into one of the varieties of "successful aging" or anti-aging. Ageist terminology and ageist ways of constructing the life course are often inverted forms of achievement-oriented narratives.

"Real Stories" and Textual Issues

With narratives, we inevitably introduce textual issues: can we grant stories about persons and their lives the same amount of textual freedom we appreciate in literary fiction? Or should they at least try to respect the basic "facts," and what are these? (Hardy 1968; Mink 1987). Many literary and artistic works play creatively with multiple interpretations of reality, such as *Gantenbein* by Max Frisch (1982), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles (1998), or the movie *Rashomon* by Kurosawa. Umberto Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (1998) provides an interesting excursion into the many interpretive twists and turns that are possible in constructing a narrative. This leaves us with a question how a "good" or reliable narrative about someone may be distinguished from a "bad" or misleading one (Carr 1991; Danto 1985)? Is this a matter of sincerity or of textual qualities? Are persons only what narratives make of them? Do narratives presuppose persons, or must persons presuppose narratives, for instance about personhood? Do narratives only matter to attain more adequate descriptions?

According to Galen Strawson (2004), it is not necessary to speak of one's self in narrative terms; even *living in time* would not necessarily imply or require a diachronic or narrative approach. According to him, something that happened to my body and left this particular scar is not happening to the present "me" or "self" who is looking at the scar. In other words, the continuity of the self is a narrative construct that tends to overlook all other aspects of the self, reducing many different situations, potentialities, and changes to what fits in the narrative scheme. The appeal of such a unifying narrative is that we seem to get a general overview of our past; however, this can only be superficial and arbitrary. Strawson's alternative would be to live more episodically in the present.

It would be hard to "make sense" of aging without stories, however, because the perspective of aging implies a diachronic approach, and stories are needed to articulate connections between episodes. Even Strawson admits that the inclination to take up narratives may become stronger as one gets older: "[O]ne's exact position in the Episodic / Diachronic / Narrative / non-

Narrative state-space may vary significantly over time according to what one is doing or thinking about, one's state of health, and so on; and it may change markedly with increasing age" (2004, 431).

But how far can stories reach? Although it has become customary to speak of "life stories," of biographies and autobiographies, it is doubtful whether it is at all possible to grasp life "as a whole" in a unified story. In other words, is a *life story* really possible or even something we should try to aim for? It is impossible to recall or reconstruct everything that happened; in that respect, the ambitions of life stories or (auto)biographies cannot be to present "the whole story." There are some instructive examples in the works of Borges (1964) and in Alexander Luria (1987), who wrote stifling stories about the catastrophe of a perfect memory and the need to forget. Laurence Sterne (1997) interestingly described how someone needed a year to write down everything that took place during one single day.

In this domain where "autobiographical memory" and "the narrative self" meet (Birren and Schroots 2006), it is instructive to learn how limited the knowledge of one's own history can be. Even for the best remembered "bump period" of adolescence and early adulthood, we may find it very hard to remember vividly how we were at the different moments in our lives. Impressive peaks or all-time lows may trigger standard memories, but the reality of everyday life is much more fuzzy. Usually, documents, photos, and films from the past as well as stories told by others dominate the image of a certain period. Thus, we forget a great deal, and such forgetting of large parts of our past is even necessary—otherwise we would not be able to lead our lives here and now. Our limited memory implies that we cannot fully grasp either the less familiar lives of others or our own history.

This gets even more complicated when we realize to what extent our lives are interwoven with those of others: we start as children, but in the course of time we figure as siblings, cousins/nephews/nieces, friends/acquaintances, uncles/aunts, parents, neighbors, colleagues. At the same time, everybody in these networks is aging and changing, and people are continually entering or leaving the networks. So on the one hand, there is continuity and a certain intimate familiarity with the person whom we have been during our lives, but on the other hand, we also become, to a certain degree, strangers to ourselves. Not only our own experience but also scientific studies teach us that far-reaching creative adaptation, distortion, and gaps are characteristic of memory rather

than objectivity (Baltes and Kliegl 1986; Hoyer and Verhaeghen 2006; Neisser 1982). We are confronted not only with uncertainty about the future but also with the inability to oversee and understand the past completely.

Selection is inevitable, if only for reasons of quantitative capacity, but is guided by complex processes. Besides the selection of specific experiences or episodes by the person who tells the story, experiences sometimes "force themselves" on the narrator because of their significance, or they are suppressed because they carry an overload of significance that is too difficult to handle. There is always composition, interpretation, and stylization. I cannot "objectively" find myself in the stories that I tell about myself or that others tell about me, because the person who figures in these stories has partly been composed by their tellers. This does not necessarily mean that a life story is merely a product of fantasy (although it can be), but it does imply that there is no accredited history that could function as an unequivocal foundation to calibrate stories about a person. Not only am I involved in the stories of my life as the *author* and the *protagonist,* but stories about my life are intertwined with the stories of other persons; they are told in specific places and connected with different audiences. All these factors have an impact on the stories that are told and jeopardize the search for the one true story of somebody's life.

The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel has made the distinction between a "problem" and a "mystery": a problem is something that lies more or less objectively before me to be solved, such as an engine that does not function. The Greek origin of the word *problem* refers to something that is "thrown in front" (*pro-ballein*) of me, whereas "mystery" refers to some "thing" that I cannot place in front of me to get a clear look at it because I am always already *involved* in it and *preoccupied* with it (Marcel 1965, 1967; cf. Cole 1988). I am not suggesting that we should accept this as a dichotomy, but the process of discovering the possible meanings of my life will change me, whereas I can repair many engines without much effect on how I understand and experience myself, except for a growing pain in my back.

That one experiences the self of twenty-five years ago and the circumstances going with it as, to a certain degree, "strange" belongs paradoxically to the constituents of one's present identity, which is reaffirmed as soon as we acknowledge the difference with one's earlier "self." Intuitively, one would say that there is a strong continuity and that one has always been "oneself," but it is not so simple to see in what sense such a strong continuity should be understood. In this context it appears worthwhile to heed the views of think-

ers such as Adorno (1973) or Lyotard (1991), who point out the importance of being open to what is seen as "non-identical," unknown, or different even within one's self and not to expel it from one's identity (Baars 2004). Such indeterminateness has given rise to the most magnificent art and literature. Otherness does not start with other cultures but is one of the constituents of one's own culture and even one's own life. Not only can generations become strangers to one another, but such estrangement also happens between us and our own past. Accepting these uncertainties may enrich the ways in which I understand my own aging and that of others and may be crucial in communicating with other generations.

5.2. A Modest Necessity of Stories

The proposed importance of stories raises the question of what the difference might be between good *stories* about somebody's life and a good *life*. There are important differences between, on the one hand, living one's life and, on the other hand, telling stories about it. Some people are very modest and make short remarks about their eventful lives, while others create long stories in which nothing much happens. Before the "narrative turn" in the humanities, Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialists even opposed the idea that living and telling stories could go together: "This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story. But you have to choose: live or tell." (Sartre 1969, 39).

It is hard to see why such a choice would be necessary; we can live *and* tell others about our experiences and actions. However, both lives and stories contain a *surplus* of meaning. On the one hand, persons and lives are more than narratives—they are their unfathomable source—and to live is always more than telling stories. The many possible meanings of what humans experience and do during their lives can be partially articulated, shared, and clarified through narratives but cannot be exhausted by them. On the other hand, narratives also have lives of their own: they have a certain independence as texts and can therefore always be reinterpreted in ways that shed new light on them because their words and metaphors can have more than just one meaning. Narrative articulations invite new interpretations, which need not *replace* old interpretations as a new scientific paradigm ("the earth revolves around

the sun") replaces a former paradigm ("the sun revolves around the earth"), but they can *enrich* the interpretations that already existed.

Changes, Themes, and Phases

Instead of focusing on somebody's whole life or on pre-established "phases" or "stages" of the life course, it might be more interesting for the persons concerned to remain attentive to significant changes that have taken place or that are taking place. While change is permanent, some changes are more important than others and have lasting consequences. Such long-term processes as aging and senescing imply that one has to face major changes: it is not possible to stay "forever young," as Bob Dylan would have it. But these processes are far from uniform; therefore, it is expedient to pay attention to the changes or life events that are actually occurring rather than to follow generalizing models or mere prejudice. In this process of attention to one's own experiences of living in time, narratives remain an important way to articulate, share, discuss, and clarify what is going on. It may be necessary to share many stories and to work through the changes that have taken place in the form of storytelling before we can go on. Changes that cut deep into lives, such as the loss of a beloved, of free movement, or of good health may even require a narrative restructuring of parts of one's personal identity.

Whether the diversity and complexity of human lives coordinates with an emphasis on integration or coherence remains to be seen. It may be more relevant to examine whether there are specific themes (problems, challenges, transitions, achievements, etc.) that play a constitutive role in certain periods. Stories can contribute to more understanding of what was happening if changes and continuities can be caught in *themes* that run through them. However, there is an overemphasis in most manuals on how aging persons should write life stories on predetermined themes—sometimes introduced in an Eriksonian way as "developmental tasks"—for certain stages of human life, making the process of telling life stories somewhat stereotyped. It may be more interesting or important to proceed from somebody's specific situations and experiences.

Out of such a thematic structuring of changes, meaningful *phases* in someone's life may emerge that are colored by a dominant theme or themes: an adventurous journey, a career as an engineer, suffering a loss, becoming a grandparent. Such phases are more meaningful to the persons concerned and do more justice to individual lives than those that are constructed accord-

ing to chronometric schemes or developmental trajectories based on averages and assumed in an ambiguous sense (where statistical scores gain normative status) to represent "normal" aging (cf. Dannefer 1984). A narrative understanding of meaningful, change-based themes and phases can shed more light on the complex and manifold lives of persons than scientific or bureaucratic generalizations or common prejudices about the life course. However, narratives do not lead to understanding the deep structures of "normal" lives. An extreme example of such a misconception is the well-known work by Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (1978), in which he professed to be able to develop a universal model of life stages on the basis of some dozens of interviews with American citizens.

If we assume that it may be fruitful or interesting to articulate situations or changes in thematic stories and to explore connections between them, it may also be useful to explore different *interpretations* of these stories. It may be valuable, at least in a heuristic sense, to open up stories about situations, persons, or episodes to alternative interpretations. Interpreting a certain situation or period in life from the thematic perspective of "trying to prove oneself" will bring out aspects that appear to fit in this interpretation. But the complexity of the same situation or period may be brought to light by an interpretation from another thematic perspective, such as "trying to help" or "dealing with guilt." Specific interpretations or plots play a potentially illuminative role when they lead to meaningful configurations of events and their interpretations. Such thematic integration has to be respectful of the varied situations, persons, actions, and occurrences that could easily challenge the dominant theme and invite other ways of a meaningful integration. In other words, the interpretive richness of texts and of living in time defy pretensions of just telling the "one and only" story.

Stories about lives or persons cannot be freed from lack of clarity or ambivalence, or immunized from other interpretations. Stories about lives are told and, on second thoughts, changed; they are written, reread, and rewritten. We do need stories, but *persons* and their *lives* are too complex to grasp in a single, unified story. This was already stated in the medieval expression *Individuum est ineffabile:* to represent an individual in a story is not possible.

Although we have to acknowledge that the definitive narrative assessment of someone's identity is impossible, since narratives cannot fully capture the complexity that is involved, we can still maintain that someone's personal identity cannot be understood *without* stories. Even if we had a precise chro-

nometrically ordered file about somebody's educational and professional activities at our disposal, this would tell us nothing about *how* that specific person fulfilled that position or role. The question of a person's identity is only partially answered by giving information on *what* a person is or was; the answer must be given—although it cannot be completed—by telling stories about *who* he was or tried to be. Moreover, there is an element in the tradition of thinking about "life as a whole" that deserves some reconsideration: in speaking awkwardly about "life plans," or in telling "the story" of somebody's life, there is also an attempt to understand crucial meanings *in life*. Sometimes this is also meant when people speak about the "end" or "purpose" of life. Rightfully criticizing the simplistic terminology of "whole," "unity," "integration," or "the purpose" must not overshadow the importance of the questions that were implicitly asked in these terms.

Criticizing unwarranted pretensions of narratives does not negate the more modest, but not less important, role of stories in sharing and reflecting experiences, nor does it diminish the task to reflect on the *cultural macro-narratives* (Baars 2010c) that are constitutive of aging experiences as they regulate the possibilities of aging persons to participate, for instance, in work or education. According to the well-known Socratic principle, a good life is at least a reflected life; and although a good life involves more than reflection, it can hardly do without it. One who never thinks about what he or she has done or what has actually happened cannot do justice to the question of how to live and age well. Reflecting on one's own life or that of another person will always be done from a particular perspective or specific situation, and it will imply telling stories (cf. Bruner 1990; Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Randall 1997; Ricoeur 1988, 1992).

Paul Ricoeur (1992) has made a distinction between *ipse* and *idem* that is important in the interpretation of aging personal identities. The concept of *idem* (Latin for "same") refers to human identity as *sameness*. This is what we encounter in stories that are meant to introduce or clarify somebody's identity in terms of his or her typical character traits, abilities, career, or achievements. The concept of *ipse* (Latin for "self"), however, refers to human identity as the *selfhood* of somebody. Here the attention is not focused on *what* somebody has done or experienced but on *who* he or she aspires to be in ethical terms—something Ricoeur explains with the example of the *promise* or "the word" that has been given. *Ipseity* refers to an ethical stance in life, for instance, in trying to be faithful, honest, or loyal—something that I promised myself or

others that I would at least sincerely try to do or to be. Both *idem* and *ipse* can only be understood in temporal perspective, but they remain quite different: "The perseverance of character is one thing, the perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again. The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another" (Ricoeur 1992, 123).

Obviously, there can be tensions between somebody's identity as *idem* and as *ipse:* I promised myself and others that I would try to be patient, but my habitual *idem*-character, to try to do too many things in too little time, seduces me to hurry and become impatient. Such tensions are the results of the challenge that is inherent in an ethical stance: when I have a patient character, I will probably not promise myself and others that I will try to be patient, but there will be other inclinations that will present a challenge and may lead to repeated conflicts. Ethics is not only about what we tend to do but also about what we tend not to do but should at least sincerely try. Seeing one's identity in terms of *idem* and *ipse* are two different ways of interpreting one's experiences or stories. Reflecting on the tensions between them may open up the stubbornness that can easily creep into the *idem*-character and lead to changes in one's ethical stance.

From this perspective, life stories are not so much a description of what happened in an empirical sense (when and where I was born, how long I stayed in one place, and the kinds of work I did, etc.) but rather a medium for reflection: a constant interpretation and reinterpretation of my actions and experiences in terms of the tensions between the *idem* and *ipse* poles of my identity. The point of "life stories" cannot be to grasp or represent a person's whole life but to share experiences and to articulate meaningful reflections.

Stories: Intertwining the Past, the Present, and the Future

One of the defining characteristics of aging is that an important part of life has already taken place. Even if the time ahead is regarded as equally exciting or even more so, the past will remain important in shaping the future. Since we have become whoever we are, questions of identity will often deal with the past—a past that is never over or completed because the changes that are part of aging also change the perception of the past. However, stories live in the present, where they are told or written, listened to or read; they feed on the interest that brings them to life, and they break off when the interest in them dies.

Moreover, it is from the present only that we can have a critical relation

to stories and wonder if things "really" were like that or should be seen differently. Stories may be reconsidered time and again and possibly retold, for we may continue to ask questions: Does this story accurately describe what happened? Should it be interpreted and told this way? Am I doing justice to others and to myself? Once stories have been formed, it is even possible to follow them backward, to *read time backward,* as it were, from the known ending to earlier phases that led to the results, and to learn from the consequences of earlier events or decisions.

Memory as the presence of the past does not just comprise what or how we *want* to remember. We only evoke a part of our memories consciously; another part evokes *us* or keeps asking for our attention, although we might prefer to forget it. In this context, Hannah Arendt (1958) referred not only to *memory* as a typically human characteristic of living in time but also to *forgiveness*. Resentment or bitterness can be a destructive form of what Augustine called the presence of the past in which painful events remain as vivid as if they took place only recently. Ultimately, non-forgiving obstructs one's openness to the present and to the future as the past stops being a source of inspiration for the future. Intensified attention to the *past* can indeed open the future in an unexpected way. As Gadamer (1993) has emphasized, it is not the forced oblivion of the past, but the force with which we examine the past that opens up new opportunities.

But a changing perception of the *future* can also lead to new questions about the past and restructure memories. In that way, questions about the meaning of the past also come from orientations toward the future when there is a need to clarify or to find out something in the past before we can go on. Moreover, stories about a possible future also presuppose a present in which a person has not only the possibility but also the courage to *have* a future or to be concerned about the future of others. In an interview in *The Times,* November 23, 2003, Nobel laureate Doris Lessing recalls how twenty years earlier she had written about an old woman in *The Diary of a Good Neighbour.* In the novel, this woman was 84—the same age as Lessing was at the time of the interview. The difference between the two characters is that the woman in the novel had decided to be "old," which in her case meant not wanting to have a future. Doris Lessing does not want to be old in that sense. She does not deny that she is getting "increasingly older." Yet the journalist meets a person with a zest for living, who tells her grandchildren: "Live, Live! Don't be scared out of living your life." Doris Lessing's art of aging is not to deny problems or to stick to

ways of life that no longer match the circumstances, yet also to withdraw from fixed images and prejudices about "being old" and to keep living one's life.

Considering all these interconnections, we can appreciate again the profoundness of Augustine's perception of the interweaving of the past, present, and future. It is far from superfluous to emphasize the importance of both the *present* and the *future* of older persons because in narrative interviews with them all attention is usually directed at the past in variations of the question "What was it like in your day?" It is apparently beyond many people's scope that older persons also live in the present, that *these* days are also *their* days, and that they might even be interested in the future. This tendency is another example of a widespread conviction concerning the life course: young people and "normal" adults are thought to be prospectively oriented and to make plans for the future, whereas older people are thought to have exclusively retrospective orientations, as if they have lived their lives and should keep themselves occupied with memories. Living in the present tends to fall out between these two preoccupations.

Institutional Narrative Practices

Narrative models are often picked up in contexts of professional care, where "reminiscence activities" are usually meant to pass the time in a pleasant way, although such programmatic intentions already restrict the possible meanings storytelling can have. Often there is a therapeutic legitimation affirming the message that it is "natural" for older people to be preoccupied with the past.

Robert Butler's early article "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged" (1963) has been very influential in introducing life stories in institutional care. He conceives of the life review as a "naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and particularly the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these reviewed experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and integrated" (1963, 66). This therapeutic transformation of life stories was one of the reasons for a critical discussion by Harry Moody (1988) on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Butler's classical article. Baars and Lamme (1993) questioned the assumption that a life review responds to a universal need to come to terms with one's life and pointed to the many different ways in which the social environments influence the ways in which reminiscent behavior is established.

In a historical perspective, the practices of institutional reminiscence re-

mind one of Michel Foucault's (1990) criticism of the duty to reveal oneself, which in European history often had the character of forced confessions. According to his analysis, the centuries-old confession practices of the Roman Catholic Church were later adopted by the human sciences that wanted to discover what might move human beings and persuaded them to subject themselves to their research and to answer their questions "for the advancement of science." Foucault's analysis of the development—or "genealogy," as he would call it—of the modern human sciences has its own merit, but if the exchange of stories is free from the clouds of enforcement, narrative *practices* can have a meaning that extends beyond the stories that are told, even if these stories are only about the past. Narrative practices can generate interest in somebody's experiences, intentions, sorrows, and pleasures, and stories flourish or perish depending on the attention with which they are told and received by the listeners.

Stories need listeners and readers. They need time: time to listen, to pay attention to specific details and nuances. These qualities have become rare in a society where too much must be done in too little time and storytelling is regarded as notoriously slow and a waste of time. Paradoxically, in such a society the fate of older people may be to be kept busy in institutions, putting together stories about their lives even when there are no interested listeners. Unfortunately, it is even more common that institutional categories wipe out the meanings of a person's life and impose definitions on their "clients" that consist usually of pathological labels, so that persons disappear behind their health problems.

Such a domination of health records is usually the last phase of an intensively monitored life course, where all kinds of categories are imposed on people and information is gathered about them, starting with the assessment of their performances in education and work, the presentation of their professional identities in the form of resumes "enriched" by chronometric records about anything that happens to be regarded as important, such as consumption patterns, Internet preferences, phone behavior, or traveling. These practices result in what could be called a "formatted palimpsest," in which the identities of aging persons disappear as in a black hole (Baars 2002). The word *palimpsest* is derived from the Greek words *palin* (anew) and *psestos* (rub off). When paper had not yet been invented and parchment was expensive, it was the custom to rub the text off an old parchment so that it could be used again. Such tiring work is no longer necessary. Nowadays palimpsests are ex-

ecuted more efficiently as persons are entered into bureaucratic formats that determine which aspects are important for the organization so that there is not even the need to delete their personal identities, which were never even considered by the system.

Narratives of the Life World and the Systemic World

Such bureaucratic processes raise the question of whether all narratives about aging are equally important in society, not in a moral sense but with respect to the impact they have or the power they exercise in society. The power of narratives will partly stem from their persuasive content, but most likely the power of the institution they represent will play a major role. This would need to be assessed in more detail for specific situations in which institutions and organizations are presenting themselves and trying to reach specific goals through narrative persuasion. To develop this a bit further, we can take Habermas's model of late modern societies as a constellation of "life world" and "systems" as point of departure (Habermas 1984; 1987; see 1.1).

In Habermas's model, the systemic world refers to the economic system and the more or less bureaucratic organizations of the political system, which must both be seen in their interconnections with globalizing markets and international institutions such as the World Bank, the OECD, or the UN (Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006). Habermas calls them *systems* because they share an impersonal way of functioning that contrasts with the *life world,* where people (should) interact with each other without merely implementing bureaucratic regulations or being driven by economic gain. Narratives about aging and aged people that are coming from these systems are very powerful since they are instrumental in regulating important domains such as labor markets, health care, institutional care, pensions, and educational opportunities. As soon as life worlds are dominated by the systemic world and people have lost the ability to communicate with each other without being guided by economic or bureaucratic considerations, Habermas calls it a *colonization* of the life world.

An important role is also played by the mass media, which spread influential cultural narratives regarding aging. As life expectancies have in a relatively short period of time broken through all historically known frames of reference, many new opportunities and challenges have arisen. However, except for an aspiration to "stay young" and promises of greater control over processes of senescing, late modern culture does not have many inspiring stories

about "late life," although many more people have reached and will reach this stage in the decades to come.

Stories about aging can be sources of inspiration but also sources of misery, making people shudder at the very prospect of aging. This may be because a culture idealizes youthfulness, so that the presence or contributions of the elderly are not considered of any importance. In that way, worshipped cultural images turn into negative generalizations.

We can observe a profound cultural ambivalence regarding aging, corresponding with two expanding markets. One market, through commercially designed narratives, advertises a successful battle against the decay of human nature in the form of wrinkles, decreased energy, and memory loss (Hall 2003; Overall 2003; Stock 2003). The ammunition for this battle can be bought in the form of expensive facelifts, liposuctions, creams, or pills; and in order to persuade the public to buy them, stories of aging people serve to market anti-aging products (see 2.2). In such situations, narratives are intended to keep older people buying and busy, with a primary interest in manipulative strategies. Another market concentrates on providing care for the elderly who are losing the battle to stay young forever, although they may continue to stay alive for a long time. Because this can put a certain pressure on collective finances, political narratives about aging are usually dominated by costs of care and pensions, leading to scenarios of aging as a profoundly problematic burden on society (Estes 2006), as if these persons are not a *part* of society. Sometimes it seems as if aging is only seen in terms of the grey waves that will flood the rich countries of the world. These stories depict aging as a thoroughly problematic and upsetting affair, something to be concealed as much as possible under a cloak of youthful activism.

Although the analysis of the mutual relations between the systems world and the life world in terms of power can be clarifying, the different constellations of life worlds and systems should not be collapsed into a generalizing dichotomy. Not only does Habermas's conception of the life world need to be developed further (Baars 2009), but the *intermediate* level between the systems world and the life worlds is underrepresented in his theory. The tensions between person-oriented life world perspectives and the impersonal, formally regulated systemic perspectives that take place *between* and *inside* institutions and organizations such as hospitals, insurance companies, large nursing homes, or governmental institutions are crucially important for the

daily realities of aging persons. I propose that the life world refers not only to that domain of society where interactions are not formally regulated, such as in family life or friendship, but also to the daily interactions, efforts, and creativity of those people who work in the systems world. Not only the clients but also the professionals are confronted with the mixed blessings of formally regulated systemic worlds. As long as bureaucratic systems are inevitable in contemporary society, there will be a more or less permanent tension between the life world and the systemic world that should remain alive in order to assert the personal interests of people who are more than mere representations of bureaucratic categories.

The relation between the systemic world and the life world should not be treated as a dichotomy because tension and interchange between life worlds and systems can potentially be creative processes of change. Many discussions, conferences, and other meetings of professionals, volunteers, and aging people testify to the intensity with which they are searching for improvements, alternatives, and experiments within the tight parameters of the societal systems that restrict the range of their projects. Narratives play an important role here as they articulate how major issues of aging must be seen and dealt with. Although they often serve the interests of systems in legitimizing their policies, these systems need the support they try to gain through their narratives. In this sense, narratives, especially cultural macro-narratives (Baars 2010), form a battleground for different perspectives on aging. The creative sensitivity still has to come from the interactive life world, especially where clients and professionals not only propagate but also "embody" inspiring views on aging or struggle with inadequate regulations in the face of major challenges. An inspiring culture of aging needs inspiring narratives.

Conclusions

In speaking about aging it is usually assumed that there is a more or less continuous "background identity" with specific characteristics that are changing over time. But how can we conceive of a continuous but also changing *personal identity* as something more than a permanent bodily marker, such as iris structure, fingerprints, or DNA? One answer to this question has been that stories about a person articulate his or her identity, a so-called narrative identity. The narrative approach is important because it breaks through a complex of

measurements and calculations that surrounds aging and gives aging persons a voice. It is also important to reflect on some limitations or untenable pretensions, however.

The narrative approach has, for instance, been used to offer a remedy for "identity problems" that have risen in late modernity as a result of accelerating change, disrupting traditions that used to give support to identities because they gave clear answers to major questions. In analyzing these remedial proposals, we encountered the assumption that integration, unification, and completion of one's life story would lead to a "good life"—something that, paradoxically, fits quite well in a modernistic tradition of "life plans" and "career selves," where life tends to be seen as a linear development. This tendency also dominates many perspectives on aging, which is either seen as a linear continuation of earlier successful life or as a linear decline.

In this discussion of narrative, and especially of life stories, I have questioned the emphasis on *descriptive completeness* and have underlined such aspects as openness to other persons and communicative contexts, because stories about lives are usually initiated by specific experiences, problems, or questions from ourselves and others, leading to stories about specific issues, periods, decisions, or situations. Such specific interests are the spirit that keeps narratives about a person's life alive and open instead of pouring out prearranged information. Of course, basic information about somebody's life can be useful as a first orientation, but this can easily be overrated. What is important about our pasts will vary with present situations and future prospects; in this sense, the past is never complete or transparent but changes as life goes on.

The interest in important changes or life events that have taken place or are actually taking place diminishes the importance of pre-established phases or stages of life according to chronometric ages together with their developmental tasks. There is no inherent logic that dictates that important life events must take place according to age unless age-related transitions are dictated by policies that organize the life course or people are excluded from certain situations because of ageist prejudice. When important positive or negative life events happen, such as recovering from a disease, losing one's health, or finding or losing a partner, this will have consequences for the persons that are concerned even if these events take place before or after the time they are "supposed" to happen. Such consequences will change the stories that people are telling about themselves and sometimes it will help them to share these stories with others.

Finally, I have discussed how stories are not pure descriptions or representations of life as it has really happened, but they inevitably introduce many textual issues that are creatively exploited in all forms of fiction. This leads to questions: Is this a fascinating life or just a good story? Can stories really represent life as it is lived? Is sharing stories just a specific form of communicative activity?

In the second part of this chapter I explored a more modest role for narratives, situating them in life worlds of listening and reflecting, while remaining open to unexpected turns and twists. Rather than speaking of "the meaning of life," I suggest reflecting on *meanings in lives,* and in this context stories can again play their role. In spite of the use of limited narrative formats in institutions, narrative practices can be important as they generate interest in the lives that people have lived and are still leading. Another topic confronts us in the form of cultural macro- narratives that influence the ways in which major parts of the life course such as aging are seen. Here, narratives are not always giving a voice to persons, but they qualify and position persons as important, interesting, or boring according to their ages.

Narratives about aging and the aged that are spread by powerful systems, including the media, deserve critical attention because they are much more influential than the narratives that are not backed up by societal power. At this point it becomes clear that narratives are indispensable but not sufficient. They must be interrelated with critical reflection, conceptual clarification, and scientific research (Baars, forthcoming). Otherwise, we might conclude that all our problems could be solved by making better stories about them. We must, therefore, continue to think about the possible meanings of aging; such reflections are connected with narratives but are not identical with them.

6

Perspectives—Toward an Art of Aging

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made . . . ROBERT BROWNING

Introduction

There is an important difference between, on the one hand, the new dynamics of aging that emerged in the rich countries during the twentieth century, gaining momentum in the twenty-first century, and, on the other hand, all previous historical constellations. The chance to live longer has increased enormously, so that many more people continue to live for a long time after having been defined as "aged." Because of these newly emerging conditions there is a great need for a bold vision for societal aging (Achenbaum 2007) but also for a contemporary *art* of aging: new cultural models or genres that can be inspiring for aging people in late modernity. That we cannot follow traditional models of old age seems inevitable; the diversity of aging experiences and the modern emphasis on individuality clash with generalizing and static representations of "old age" or "senescence," requiring more open and dynamic approaches. This may make lives more insecure, but it also makes them potentially richer. Instead of living according to a culturally defined phase of life with clear roles, late modern aging is challenged by new possibili-

ties to discover, improvise, share, and clarify what it might mean to lead long and creative lives.

In a culture that judges people's appearances by commercially idealized images of youth or dynamic adulthood, however, aging identities are undermined, not supported. The dominant preference throughout modernity for the "new" or "most advanced" has in late modernity come to include "young." As a result, late modern aging has become burdened with attempts to stay young. Aging is no longer seen as acquiring valuable human qualities or as fully developing one's creativity, but instead it is seen as losing one's youth, as if this were the only phase of life that counts. This idealization of young and dynamic adulthood is not just some superficial or short-lived phenomenon hyped through the media; it has far-reaching and long-term effects. As the labor markets cling to the cultural ideal of the young, attractive employee who is supposed to be more productive, older workers risk chronic unemployment and may have to take less-qualified jobs than would be the case in a less ageist society.

Through influential but illusive images of eternal youth, the vulnerability inherent in life is pushed out of sight, evoking an abstract image of a "normal" world that knows only happiness, health, and self-confident winners who seem to be able to afford all of this. This representation of human life is grossly inadequate not only with regard to aging but also to the (usually overstressed) "active life." The vulnerability and limitations inherent in human life are not really faced and respected as situations that normal human beings may encounter; instead, they are avoided or left to professionals. This view of life also affects disabled or mentally handicapped young people as well as sick and weak persons, who are denied a dignified place in the world of those around whom everything seems to revolve. All those "others," who deviate from a dazzling normality, form an unwelcome reminder of the fundamental vulnerability of life.

When such a fundamental process of human life as aging is pushed out of sight, it will inevitably resurface in other places. Usually the return of the repressed implies some distortion. In the many reports of governmental and transnational institutions such as the UN, the OECD, or the World Bank, the increased longevity of the rich populations of the world leads to alarming "old-age-dependency ratios." The many people who just seem to keep on living are portrayed as creating budgetary disasters, although other destructive processes such as wars and financial crises create more serious burdens.

Since the quality of care is not high on the agenda of late modern societies, the costs of care will inevitably figure as a burden and a threat to other activities that are seen as more important. Such alarmist reports strengthen the view that life should be lived by "normal" young and dynamic adults, that there are just too few of them compared to all those aged people who live longer and longer. The reports about the devastating effects of the "aging populations" in terms of the costs of health care and pensions actually define "older" people by their imminent pathologies and long-lived passivity. Both the commercial anti-aging culture and the alarmist reports about rising old-age-dependency ratios implicitly characterize aging as an abnormal process: the first by portraying aging as increasing ugliness and unattractiveness, the second by identifying aging people as a burden. The adult life course tends to be divided in the short-lived, vigorous, and dynamic existence of young and "normal" adults on the one hand, and an extended decline on the other. Artificially bright, sunny conditions and a happy life are followed by equally artificial darkness, decline, and depression.

To regard aging as a pathological process, even when it comes with illness or disability, means to ignore the basic dignity and creative potential of older human beings. They are not just bodies that take a long and costly time to decay. I remember a 102-year-old woman (because of her age she would be classified as a *centenarian*) who told me that her later life had been much better than she had expected. Ever since she had turned 60, she had waited for cancer to come and get her, but it didn't happen. Would she have been better prepared had she actually gotten cancer? Is there no perspective for aging beyond anti-pathological hope?

If we remain within the chronometric calculations of ages and costs and take the contemporary figures about longevity seriously (assuming that these life expectations will remain the same in the future or even rise), a deep cultural conflict opens up: although more people than ever before will experience an extended phase of life in which they will be seen as "aged" or "older," it has become less clear what aging might mean or what older people could contribute to society other than as consumers. One would expect a relaxation of former age segregations when people live longer, but surprisingly, a culture of staying young has taken over and regards aging as something that must be fought against. "Aged" people may have a long life ahead of them without a respected meaning. Moreover, they are confronted with generalizations that deny their individuality and that may become even more pronounced dur-

ing a long life. This conflict is all the more striking because individuality has become a major value in late modern societies.

Fortunately, this neglect and depreciation of aging persons has also led to reactions that portray aging in positive terms. Although they may serve as a healthy antidote to ageist prejudice, many publications aimed at older people copy the commercial culture by promising a successful and happy life into aging without acknowledging its vulnerabilities and limitations. If persons live long enough, they will experience an increasing vulnerability as processes of senescing weaken and undermine them, but it remains uncertain *when* and *which* problems will manifest with *what* consequences for *whom*. Moreover, many people who could be categorized as chronically ill find the strength to lead interesting and creative lives. There is no reason to categorize people according to their ages, because neither creativity nor vulnerability manifest themselves in a linear way. Not only are aging people capable of continuing growth in experience and competence in the specific activities and fields of their interest, especially when their competences are acknowledged, but they can also develop important skills in dealing with their problems or restrictions when they are chronically ill or disabled.

Is it possible to develop an inspiring culture of aging that neither belittles the exciting possibilities of enjoying a long and meaningful life nor hides the vulnerabilities of life—a culture that celebrates aging but also remains realistic? To give an answer to this question requires efforts in many different fields such as social policy, pensions, labor markets, education, voluntary work, and care. However, it will also be necessary to rethink of *aging* as an *extended art of life*. To continue this quest, I begin this chapter with the observation that late modern society tends to isolate from each other two processes that I regard as inherent in human aging. In the first place, we have to face that the vulnerability that is inherent in life may increase as persons are living longer, though not in synchrony with their ages. In the second place, we should recognize that aging is potentially a process of ongoing creativity and of deepening the uniqueness of individuals. These two processes may well be interrelated and may lead to a growing sensitivity for the unique qualities of vulnerable life, although this will not be the automatic result of "a higher age," "the passing of time," or the "seasons of life." The art of aging includes both of these aspects of aging, and it should not only be the domain of healthy, well-off seniors.

In this chapter these two fundamental processes will be discussed successively, although this is more a matter of emphasis than clear distinction. In 6.1

I will consider the relation between the vulnerability of human existence on the one hand, and its dignity on the other. Even if this vulnerability increases and intensifies, it should still be seen as an existential process and should not be reduced to a pathological process, even when pathologies occur that deserve treatment. From this perspective on human dignity, a short critical assessment of medical ethics and structural patriarchy will be given. In 6.2 I will turn to a discussion of the wisdom traditions that have connected aging with acquiring knowledge and insight, not just as parts of a typical culture of older people but as something of importance even or especially to younger people. In this section I make some distinctions regarding wisdom and the possible contemporary relevance of this manifold idea for aging in the twenty-first century. In the second half of 6.2, I give an overview of the different temporal perspectives that play an important role in aging. As a way of concluding this book, I develop in 6.3 a perspective of an art of aging in which unique lives are deepened but also extended in a sense other than a longer duration.

6.1. Interhuman Vulnerability and the Dignity of "Unsuccessful" Aging

On and on the rain will fall
Like tears from a star, like tears from a star,
On and on the rain will say
how fragile we are, how fragile we are . . . STING, *NOTHING LIKE THE SUN,* 1987

The Vulnerability of the Interhuman Condition

The prevailing views on aging show a tendency to create a contrast between a "normal" vigorous adulthood, which can be subjected to protracted stress without any problem, and persons who are regarded as "older" as soon as they have reached a certain age. This contrast works well in a society aiming at an increasing acceleration. As a young driver in front of a TV camera the other day put it: "Get them all off the road at sixty-five!" An ever-faster life inevitably involves expelling those who are considered to be too slow, with precarious effects on both sides. In the social organization of life the contrast between young, fast, capable, and strong and old, slow, incapable, and weak ought to be put in perspective. The vulnerability of life is not restricted to older people but has a much more fundamental significance.

Perhaps the most overwhelming form in which we are confronted with our fundamentally human vulnerability is the sudden intrusion of harm and evil: a baby suddenly dead in a cradle, a child overrun by somebody who wanted to step on the gas, or a young parent who gets terminally ill. This fundamental vulnerability manifests itself not only in private life but also in large-scale catastrophes such as wars and natural disasters. These reinforce the experience of a fundamental vulnerability and insecurity, especially if we cannot make any sense of such occurrences. We can easily feel like the defenseless victims of unpredictable harm, so it should not come as a surprise that there is a firm market for illusions of invulnerability, ranging from dangerously heavy SUVs and all kinds of weaponry to social isolation in fenced communities.

Human life, however, is lived by vulnerable beings. Not only does it entail death, but human freedom implies the possibility of both intense happiness and equally intense suffering. This fundamental condition concerns life in all its stages. It does not imply, however, that we are helplessly subjected to all kinds of harm that cannot be changed. Often we can remove causes of misery, and we should do so if possible. In his later work, Alasdair MacIntyre states that no account of "goods, rules and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate" if it does not acknowledge "our initial animal condition" (1999, x). However, to me it is important to see the human condition, not as an animal condition with a surplus but as an *interhuman* condition that is characterized not only by its vulnerability but also by humane responses. If these responses are not given, we can rightly say that something important or even essential is missing, for our basic condition is not animal or instinct driven, or a state of splendid isolation, but interhuman from the beginning to the end.

I propose, therefore, a revision of the concept of the "human condition" that has been used for centuries to speak about old age and death. The original Latin concept *conditio humana* was first used by the skeptic thinker Pierre Charon at the beginning of the seventeenth century in a historical context in which all-embracing meaningful structures of life that had been impressive for a long time had fallen apart (Rentsch 1997). In this new, modern perspective on their "condition," humans were thrown back on themselves and declared independent, but they were also portrayed as beings who had to struggle in isolation, more or less heroically, with the major questions of life and death. In contrast to this artificial *Robinsonade* that we encounter throughout modernity, whether it be it the form of the philosophy of "the rational subject" or in contemporary individualism, I would emphasize that human life is from the

very beginning intertwined with the lives of other people. A lifelong process such as aging must be understood in relationships with others in a social context of reproduction, education, generations, and intergenerational relations. Even in the evolution of the post-reproductive longevity that has become typical of our species, interhuman relationships and survival strategies probably played a crucial role (Hawkes 2003; Hrdy 2009). Considering this constitutive importance of others for our lives, I would rephrase the traditional expression and state that aging is part of our "interhuman condition" (Baars 2002; 2010). It belongs to the most basic characteristics of human beings, like being bodily or living a finite life. The interhuman condition takes shape in life worlds that can be very different from each other, although often some basic ways of living are shared and taken for granted in each of them.

We are not *thrown* as a *project* (*geworfene Entwurf*) into the inauthenticity of "Them," as Heidegger put it in his neglect of interhuman relationships, before further resigning in his later work to the passivity of a given destiny (*Geschick*) (Heidegger 2002). Rather, as Hannah Arendt made clear in her response to Heidegger, emphasizing the fundamental importance of natality, we are *born* into the world (Arendt 1958). This natality implies not only the uniqueness of each human being but also his or her social embeddedness. Indeed, we are born from and within interhuman relationships, remain completely dependent on care for many years, and remain strongly oriented toward others, even if we miss them in loneliness.

Emphasizing the fundamental meaning of the *interhuman* condition is not incompatible with respect for personal identities. Nor does referring to a "we" imply harmony or unanimity: passionate debates arise, especially where common interests are at stake. There is, rather, an interweaving of personal identities: when a person relates to others, he or she relates at the same time to himself or herself. Human beings are born, live, age, and die as unique individuals, but this irreducible uniqueness should not be misunderstood to imply that social and cultural contexts are only external: they are of constitutive importance (Baars 1991).

A sensitivity for vulnerability is to an important degree constitutive of the *quality* of the interhuman condition and shapes how and with what intensity we take part in life. A sense of possible harm is indispensable for responsible actions and to face the possible—and ultimately inevitable—death of others or ourselves may contribute to a fuller experience of the value of a relationship. Without relying on a praxis-without-guarantees, no human praxis can

take place. We cannot assume that certain people will always be around, as a kind of fitted cupboard in the life world, nor can we assume that the way we communicate will always "function." There is no transcendental guarantee that communication will always succeed, as philosophers such as Habermas and Apel seem to suggest sometimes, nor can mutual understanding be safeguarded against misunderstanding in any other way (Wellmer 1993). The joy of understanding something is always accompanied by possible misunderstandings, so that mutual understanding is never definitive or completely secured. In this sense, possible misunderstanding is not due to an external interference that should be neutralized but a sign of the inconclusiveness of learning processes and the never-ending transformation of rationality and morality. We continue to need meaningful answers, even if they are not permanent or final. This fundamental vulnerability is internally related to such aspects as spontaneity, creativity, and the openness of the future; and it concerns life in all its domains or phases. The lack of positive and negative certainties turns life into an adventure; we cannot live easily with insecurity, but we could not live without it either. From this interpretation of the fundamental nature of human vulnerability, we can now turn to its manifestations in aging.

Aging and Increasing Vulnerability

To approach aging from the perspective of a fundamental vulnerability of the interhuman condition is meant not as a way to conceal or play down problems that persons may experience in aging but as a way to accept aging with all its unknown possibilities, problems, and promises as an important part of human life. In contrast to tendencies to set aging and "the aged" apart from normality, aging is basically the continuation of life beyond a number of years that would indicate the ending of "normal adulthood." True, aging also involves senescing processes of the bodies that we are, and if we continue to live, these processes will slowly or suddenly but inevitably increase our vulnerability into fragility or "frailty" and death, but aging should not be *reduced* to senescing. Nor should it be approached in terms of arbitrary generalizations based on chronometric age. The ways in which senescing processes will manifest are largely unpredictable, because they are constituted in extremely complex ways, involving individual chance and action as well as environmental and genetic characteristics.

The dominant tendencies to define people as "aged," "elderly," or "old" when they have reached a certain chronometric age and to exclude them from

normality and regard them as embodiments of senescing are highly problematic and prevent the integration of aging in normal life or society as a whole. Only very rough predictions can be made concerning healthy individuals. The most reliable scientific prediction is that they will not live any longer than the "maximum life span," but this is just an *empirical* maximum that will be changed by the next person who will live beyond that age. There are, within a fairly broad range, neither positive nor negative guarantees. A well-known but still instructive example is the life of Mrs. Calment, who sold her apartment to her lawyer when she was 90 years old, stipulating that she could stay there on a lifelong monthly allowance. Since the new owner was 43 at that moment, this seemed to him a very profitable transaction. However, Mrs. Calment did not intend to give up active life prematurely; at the age of 85 years she had taken up fencing, and when she was 100, she still rode her bike. In an interview given on the occasion of her 120th birthday, the journalist discretely said he hoped to be able to congratulate her again next year. She answered that she assumed this would be the case, since he made a healthy impression. She died at the age of 122, surviving her lawyer, who had died some years before and had paid an amount for the apartment far exceeding its actual value.

A long and healthy life like that of Mrs. Calment seems attractive. She had sold painter's equipment to Vincent van Gogh and had lived through an impressive part of recent history. But during her life she had to face not only the death of her husband but of every friend and acquaintance. She stood at the graves of her only daughter and even that of her only grandchild. The increasing vulnerability of life concerns not only one's own life but also the growing possibility of losing friends, partners, or even children and becoming deeply lonely. Aging is part of the interhuman condition, a social-existential, rather than a pathological, process.

The Dignity of "Unsuccessful" Aging

That the vulnerability of human life increases as one continues to live in irreversible finite time does not need extensive documentation; there is an abundance of alarmist reports about these issues. To see them in the context of an interhuman condition implies asking critical questions about the quality of the human responses to these issues, and especially about the dignity of those who become dependent on others. A long life may lead to dementia or other misery in which a person retreats into a shadow of his or her former self. Such processes demonstrate the deep meaning of the concept "interhuman condi-

tion," since they can sometimes be more difficult for the intimates who witness these developments than for the person concerned. However, even such a diminished life is still entitled to dignity. Even if a life seems to be hardly meaningful, this does not imply that our caring relationship is meaningless.

The gerontological paradigm of "successful aging" takes it for granted that those who suffer from a protracted illness or who die prematurely do not age "successfully." Although this definition of "successful aging," stemming from influential work by the gerontologists Rowe and Kahn (1987), may have been a fruitful impulse for further research into the origin and prevention of pathological forms of senescing, it does not lead to a more positive inclusion of aging in life and society. It reflects a society in which "good" has become equated with "successful," but it is not clear how such a career-oriented concept can be adequate for the way we live. Fortunately, there have been some critical discussions about these issues (Poon 2003), which have led to a more respectful approach to chronically diseased persons who represent the inevitable counterparts of the "successful agers" and must witness that "being a failure" must be added to their suffering. In such a success-oriented culture, those who are less fortunate because of chronic disease or disability run the risk of being deprived of the necessary care and dignity, because appealing to success in aging cannot be separated from personal achievement and responsibility for the outcome. If people are less fortunate, the best they may hope for is that they are efficiently brought together in demarcated, professionally organized environments. Sometimes there is no other option, but often there is. However this may be in specific contexts, the person needing intensive care and nursing should primarily be seen as a human being, not as an embodiment of pathology. A lack of awareness of one's own fundamental vulnerability can lead to a callousness that will impede the quality of care or professional treatment.

Autonomy and Structural Paternalism

In medical ethics, respect for the patient's autonomy is one of the leading principles, together with beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice (Beauchamp and Childress 2008). This emphasis on the importance of the patient's autonomy usually leads to a plea for "informed consent": the possibility for patients to make their own decisions regarding treatment based on information concerning diagnosis, proposed therapies, and risks involved. Informed consent presupposes a patient who is able to understand the relevant information and to make decisions on the basis of that information; therefore, respect for auton-

omy generally amounts to respect for the ability to make decisions. Autonomy is understood as composed of skills that allow making these decisions, and these skills will be assessed by those who decide whether someone qualifies for informed consent (Wear 1993). All these efforts are meant to put an end, as much as possible, to "medical paternalism": a traditional medical ethos that aims primarily at the patient's well-being and less at taking seriously what the patient has to say, "for the patient's own good." Depending on the competence ascribed to a patient, such paternalism is considered acceptable in specific cases: the less competent a patient, the more justification for paternalistic intervention. Therefore, a morally acceptable "weak" form of paternalism should be distinguished from a morally unacceptable "strong" paternalism, which ignores even a competent expression of the will of patients (Feinberg 1971; Patzig 1993; Quante 2002).

Several methods are used to assess the competence of the person involved. Some authors have proposed a "sliding scale strategy": the person who opposes relatively simple medical surgery with few risks should show a higher degree of competence than someone who is opposed to risky surgery. In the latter case, this opposition would be accepted sooner because of the more serious risks involved. This is still a type of paternalism, although it is an indirect one. Medical professionals are still pulling most of the strings; they decide on the risk factor of the surgery and the degree of competence necessary for the patient to be considered responsible for his own life. That is why this strategy has been criticized as the old paternalistic wolf in sheep's clothing (Wear 1993). It also leaves unanswered the fundamental question of what to do when a person opposes doing a competence test in any form. Is this opposition only interpreted as a sign of incompetence? As another symptom of what makes him or her a patient?

Many of the contemporary problems regarding autonomy are the result of what could be called *structural* paternalism, since each professional seems to represent a complex of financial interests, organizational dynamics, legal protections and claims, high-tech machinery, highly specialized expertise, and so on. The appeal to "autonomy" is a rather formal attempt to protect people from this structural dominance in modern medical institutions. The advancing specialization increases the asymmetry between expert and layman but also between one medical professional and another; often a specialist is little more than a layman in the field of the other. Thus, it is not always easy to pass on the information needed for informed consent in such a way that even

competent patients can understand the information and that qualities such as respect, sympathy, and trust do not lose all meaning and become synonymous with dependency.

Nowadays, young physicians no longer take the traditional Hippocratic Oath, which stated that they would "not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone," but some modernized version (Edelstein 1943). The dramatic changes that have taken place in their profession pose new problems, many of them arising from the disproportionate relation between overwhelmingly dominant medical expert systems on the one hand and individuals in their most vulnerable moments on the other. Specialization and technological approaches lead to an objectivism of pathological parts so that the person whose leg, stomach, or breast is being treated feels ignored. This appears to be less of a problem when a knee, for example, is hurt. But when confronted with a life-threatening condition, the situations of the patient *and* of those around him assume another existential quality.

In contrast to all institutional and professional neglect, the specific person is the condition for the therapy from beginning to end; without him or her, there is neither symptom nor need for diagnosis or therapy. In a technologically mediated approach to medicine, professionals focus on parts of the body in the form of cells, tissue, organs, functions, and test results, so that time and again medical professionals themselves have to return to the life world where they meet human beings who have bodies just like their own. If they do not do so, people are seen only as reference points of objectifying approaches, irrespective of their competences. They are reduced to meaningless bodily fragments.

The Swiss lawyer Peter Noll (1987) wrote a book about his experiences with bladder cancer. He rejected surgery because he did not want to be caught in a "urological-surgical-radiological therapy machinery" that would make him increasingly dependent. Because all hope and perspective would hinge upon the functioning of this machinery, he would die in an impoverished environment as far as human relationships were concerned. A friend of mine who is confronted with cancer and has regular appointments with medical professionals says that she is not only supposed to take off her coat at the door but also to "leave her brains there." Even normal questions such as inspection of one's own files are called "troublesome" and unnecessary. This gives rise to burdening conflicts that are incompatible with the need to trust and a certain surrender. And all this takes place in situations where so much energy

is needed just to cope. It is therefore understandable that most patients are afraid of conflicts and adopt an accommodating attitude from the start.

Although late modernity offers more possibilities to cure health problems (increasing the possibilities for a good life), there are many clashes between the qualitative character of specific life worlds and medical-technological objectivism. The model of the well-informed consumer who makes autonomous choices is too limited: autonomy, vulnerability, and dependence are not *opposites* but different aspects of *human dignity.* This is not a dignity that is associated with a profession or job, or the respect for someone because of his or her special qualities or merits: human dignity implies respectful care even if a person is not able to articulate his or her will.

It is not always necessary or even possible to hear explicitly what someone wants before we should offer some help: normally, we assume that someone who lies unconscious on the pavement wants to be helped. But this does not limit our respect for the autonomy of that person: human beings are autonomous *and* needy, creative *and* dependent, competent *and* vulnerable. Respect for autonomy presupposes that its preconditions, such as food, clothing, education, and care, are met with (Nussbaum 2000). Thus we speak of circumstances *un*worthy of man, even if people can make their own decisions (are said to be "autonomous") but lack food, care, or adequate housing. This dignity belongs to human beings as such; it does not depend on tests for specific skills. Since acting autonomously, even in this modest sense (which does not suggest independence of others), presupposes the fulfillment of many other needs, it is important not to misunderstand autonomy individualistically by setting it against the need for care. As is emphasized in the "Ethics of Care" approaches discussed in section 1.3, we are all dependent on the care of others in various stages of our lives. This care is not a threat to our autonomy; on the contrary, it facilitates being (modestly) autonomous.

Ultimately, these issues lead to the question of what kind of life we would like to live. The institutionalization and organization of care presuppose answers to a number of questions that cannot be understood from the perspective of an objective observer or budgetary analyst. These questions have to be asked and answered from the perspective of somebody who is involved and concerned. A traditional guide here is the so-called Golden Rule, which states that we should treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves and that we should not do to them what we would not like to be subjected to. Although this remains an important rule, it does not cover all relevant aspects

because the other person is really an *other* person. The danger of paternalism is that we decide what should be decided by the other. It cannot just be a matter of our own (good) intentions; the (presumptive) will of an other person is involved. A sensitivity to what someone else presumably wants even in difficult circumstances helps a person to be no more dependent than is necessary and allows him or her the freedom to cope with illness or other major problems, not necessarily alone but in his or her own way. To object that this is arbitrary, since there are no unambiguous criteria, is to ignore what it is all about: being in touch with the persons involved and being sensitive to what they say or, if they cannot speak, to the signs they may give. Clear, unambiguous criteria for professional conduct cannot replace this form of attention, which deserves its proper place in an interplay with professional codes.

It would be a mistake to think that there would be no problem with paternalism once it has been established that a person has little or no competence. On the contrary, it is in these cases, when persons are at their most vulnerable, that this issue poses itself most clearly in a moral sense (Rehbock 2002). According to Merleau Ponty (1989), even persons with serious mental restrictions live a full existence in the sense that there is still a personal core consisting of "the ability of the patient to be" (cf. Gadamer 1993; Jaspers 1958). It is exactly in those cases where no "normal" human ability seems present and tests may scientifically establish the absence of "autonomy" that the issue of human dignity arises fully. By analogy, the quality of a society is largely decided by the ways in which it deals with the most vulnerable; the less capable of intellectual or verbal skills people are, the more important it is to be sensitive to their wishes or presumptive wishes shining through in their attempts to communicate. Moreover, a person with whom contact seems impossible may suddenly have clear moments, so that we can get in touch with him or her, however briefly. In recent years, similar views have been expressed in reflections on Alzheimer's disease, for instance by Tom Kitwood (1997) and Steven Sabat (2001; Sabat and Harré 1992; Hughes, Louw, and Sabat 2006). When people are no longer capable of direct, understandable communication, as can be the case with people suffering from advanced dementia, the only way to get in touch with them is to extend communication to less obvious forms such as using body language, paying attention to subtle reactions expressing like or dislike, and showing facial expression or gestures (Feil 2002; Harris 2002). It may be a matter of giving more care or other care, or of not taking away more responsibility than necessary, so that someone can manage the

circumstances of life in his or her own way as much as possible. The important questions remain: What does the other person wish? What does she need? In their account of humane medical care in institutions, Hämmerli and Wettstein (1991) emphasize the importance of finding out whether a dislike is a passing thing (caused for example by confusion as a result of dehydration) or recurs time and again. A careful assessment includes involvement of other experts, relatives, and friends and the recognition of a large range of variation both between persons and between separate moments in time.

Care can be bought, but good care also flows from compassion and the awareness of a shared dignity of vulnerability. Martha Nussbaum observes: "Even though good institutions cannot prevent old age and death, they can address the needs of the elderly, those who care for the elderly, and the bereaved relatives. But this will not happen if we do not cultivate in citizens a compassionate understanding of the weight and meaning of these predicaments" (Nussbaum 2003, 405). A nourishing life world that in its specific way lives up to the needs and qualities of the interhuman condition requires a more general climate of care in which care for oneself, for others, and for just institutions are interrelated and support each other. Increasing vulnerability is not, however, the whole story of aging. Understanding of aging will be deepened if it is connected with the creativity of unique lives.

6.2. Toward an Art of Aging: Beyond Conventional Wisdom

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communication
Through the dark cold and empty desolation . . .
In my end is my beginning T. S. ELIOT, *FOUR QUARTETS*

In the first chapter I discussed how aging in contemporary society has become dominated by views and policies that overemphasize chronometric time in approaches to the life course as well as in studies of "the aged" or processes of senescing. During this critical account of chronometric time I have stated re-

peatedly that this temporal perspective remains important and useful in many respects; however, many problems arise when this instrumental perspective is overemphasized or even seen as the only "real" perspective on time, leading to rather abstract generalizations about age categories with quite concrete implications. Because of its scientific prestigious exactness, chronometric calculations tend to hide the political preferences or macro-narratives that these calculations actually help to execute. One such cultural macro-narrative is the widespread message that it is good to *change* and, moreover, to *accelerate change:* to look for the newest products or youngest persons and value them above all others; to be more up-to-date or faster than somebody else; to do more in less time and to avoid standing still because on the running machine of late modern life this would be identical with being thrown off the machinery. Such orientations may be useful in athletics, racing, or highly competitive societal domains, but as a general cultural orientation it will be harmful for all activities and situations that call for a more attentive presence.

I have also discussed how this late modern ideal of acceleration leads to a premature cultural senescing, so that people are labeled as "aged" or "older" at an earlier age than before, although the same chronometric calculi of life expectancies tell them that they will probably live longer and stay healthier than ever before. This paradoxical development has led to organizations such as the AARP and the many similar organizations that have emerged in Europe and other countries for all those who have become older than 50. Partly, they have evolved in response to these practices, and partly, they have institutionalized them. As long as people remain employed, this cultural narrative of accelerated senescence may not disturb them, but as soon as they become unemployed, they are confronted with generalizations about the "older worker" that may already hit persons when they are older than 40 or 45.

In the second chapter I discussed the impressive commercial enterprise that is forming around this accelerated senescence of the "younger older." Because they have the longest future as customers ahead of them, younger persons are especially soaked with messages that senescence creeps up on you long before you expect it. Even very young women should buy expensive creams to ward off wrinkles and fight the effects of gravity on their bodies. The goal of this brainwashing is to make them eager for the possible redemption from the fate of early senescence by the grace of the anti-aging industry that promises its customers that they can actually become younger and remain young

by buying its products. From a rather bleak perspective on growing older, we suddenly enter a world where aging doesn't count and everything seems possible. Old magical images of rejuvenation revive in reciting scientific formula.

These cultural developments contrast strongly with my personal experiences of encountering older persons who impressed me with an unforgettable reflective sensitivity. Alas, such qualities are not directly linked to greater age. A person may have lived a hundred years or more without ever having thought much about his life or having paid any attention to the people close to him. As people live longer, they may even become hardened and embittered over what has been done to them, developing strong prejudices and fixed opinions about what is "normal" and "right" as opposed to "abnormal" and "wrong." Wisdom could never be taken for granted.

It can be maintained, however, that aging offers *opportunities* for a greater reflective sensitivity because of the many changes that will inevitably be experienced during a long life. It is true that these can also lead to disillusionment and disappointment, but even these experiences can be transformed into more awareness of the limitations of human beings or the unpredictable effects of situational factors and misunderstandings—effects that one may erroneously have attributed to the choices people make or to their characters. A disillusioned, wiser though not necessarily sadder man may have a greater ability to see things in their proper perspective and a quicker understanding of deceit or false pretense. This would have been a blessing for King Lear.

Older and Wiser?

"Wisdom is an art of life." SENECA

"Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise." These words of the fool to King Lear, who makes a disaster of his retirement, remind us that according to a long and broadly shared tradition, aging should be accompanied by wisdom. In most contemporary cultures this belief is still held, although the meaning or relevance of such wisdom usually remains vague. The ambivalence of the connection between aging and wisdom surfaces when somebody's "wisdom" is praised in speeches that celebrate the withdrawal or exclusion of aging persons from their positions.

The widespread association between aging and wisdom has deep historical roots in different traditions; its basic message is that people learn important

lessons during their lives and that younger people can also, or even especially, benefit from these lessons. Of course, this is only convincing when aging people have acquired insight in situations that remain relevant for the young. If they are growing up in completely different circumstances, the lessons of older people may contain little of interest unless they change their focus. Are circumstances in late modernity indeed changing so rapidly that the experiences of aging persons are becoming irrelevant for the young?

Is it possible to develop an inspiring perspective on aging in late modern contexts from the wisdom traditions? This may not be as easy as it seems. True, most wisdom traditions contain a deep respect for what is "old" in strong contrast to the basic orientation of late modernity toward what is "new" and "young." It is one thing to (re)establish the dignity of aging but quite another thing to grant people the status of a sage simply because they have a reached a higher age.

Based on an extensive multicultural study of the history of wisdom, Aleida Assmann (1991) distinguished four main types of wisdom, three of them illustrated by Shakespearean characters:

1. The *founding* wisdom of the good ruler, such as Solomon, who has to pass judgment on a wide diversity of matters without having any established rules to go by. As he takes his decisions, the good ruler lays the foundation for principles such as justice, goodness, or fairness.
2. The *magic* wisdom of nature and "the cosmos," as represented by Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The emphasis here lies on esoteric knowledge that can be acquired only after initiation. In its later forms, this type of wisdom opposes modern science, yet it is often characterized by its imitation, with an emphasis on systematic doctrines and special academies.
3. The *conventional* "fatherly" wisdom, as shown by Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The general message of this type of wisdom is that an older person has learned something from his or her experiences that may be worth considering. The danger of this type of wisdom is in equating personal experiences with knowledge about life "as such." Polonius wants his son to remember what he tells him because he has learned what "life" is like: "Here, My blessing with thee! And these few precepts in thy memory." He then recites precepts such as "Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice"; "Costly thy habit, as thy

purse can buy, but not expressed in fancy"; "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be"; "To thine own self be true."

4. The *skeptical* wisdom, according to Assmann, is illustrated by Jacques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* He sees through human vanity and gives his account of human life between the stages of the infant, "mewling and puking in the nurse's arms," and that of the dotard, whose life is no more than "a second childhood and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

Assmann's distinctions allow us to see that the type of wisdom that many traditions ascribed to "old" people was *conventional* wisdom. Conventional wisdom has historically made an important connection between aging and wisdom, but such a competence of "the old" to give advice and guidance to "the young" is most viable in a relatively static society where extensive experience and knowledge of the tradition are decisive. Moreover, in premodern cultures an impressive overview of the available knowledge and important customs could often be acquired through a lifelong dedication. Such a long life in good health was not granted to many, so those who did live long and acquired a broad overview could gain special status. Both for everyday life and in a more intellectual sense, this traditional affinity between aging and wisdom has been undermined through accelerating change and specialization of knowledge. A universally educated person with an all-inclusive view of the available knowledge has become an illusion, especially when knowledge is seen in a global perspective.

In the third chapter I discussed the Socratic tradition of a committed *search* for wisdom, with its critical approach of conventions or ill-founded ideas (3.2) because this tradition still offers a promising perspective for late modern aging. Such a contemporary concept of wisdom might combine the most valuable aspects of the conventional and the skeptical form of wisdom. The value of the conventional type is the idea that an older person may have learned something from his or her experiences that may be worth considering. Its weakness is the tendency to hold on to conclusions that may have been adequate when they were made, but have been protected from critical inspection and thus have become rigid. At this point, the skeptical form of wisdom has its value because it can prevent one from clinging to unreflected and outdated convictions. Its weakness, however, is a tendency to turn into cynicism. Shakespeare's Jacques, for example, tends to observe life as an out-

sider who is not just critical of pomposity but who reduces human life as such to a futile vanity.

We must make a further distinction, one that that is missing in premodern conceptions of wisdom, between "wisdom," on the one hand, and science, factual knowledge, or adequate information, on the other hand. The Stoics, including Cicero, had no problem combining wisdom with what they called "science." Their definition of wisdom, used for centuries, was *Sapientia est rerum divinarum et humanarum scientia:* "Wisdom is the sum of the knowledge (*scientia*) of divine and human affairs" (Cicero 1913, 153). For Augustine too, there was still a unity of wisdom and *scientia;* his concept of wisdom was permeated with Christian theology and included the "science" of divine affairs, to which the "science" of worldly affairs should be subjected.

After the collapse of the medieval worldviews, the Renaissance witnessed a strong desire and intensive search for wisdom, and it might have been better if this search had *accompanied* the development of modern science. The motto of humanists such as Erasmus (1469–1536) or of Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), whose *Essays* (1991) were also a source of inspiration for Shakespeare, was "Know thyself," the Greek motto that was chiseled into the wall of the front porch of Apollo's temple in Delphi. In the classical Greek context, this admonition meant primarily that mortals should know their place before the gods, which was also a motive in Socrates' modest statement that he would not be wise: only the gods were wise. The Renaissance, however, interpreted "Know thyself" as a call to the development of self-knowledge in a world that should no longer be *theocentric* (i.e., revolving around God or gods) but should be *anthropocentric:* turning around "man," including the patriarchal connotations of this term. In spite of such tendencies, many of these Renaissance or humanistic authors are still worth reading, particularly as they write about their experiences in aging (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming). Montaigne's *Essays* (1991), for instance, were developed as a medium to express himself and to search "amidst imperfection and passions" for a personal wisdom, as he puts it, that can face suffering and misfortune but that serves the *transpersonal* goal of trying to improve understanding and morals. In this way a narrow perspective of self-knowledge was transcended in aiming at articulating experiences that could be valuable for other persons in very different situations. Such extension and reaching out beyond one's personal horizon seems crucial for any concept of wisdom. If it is possible at all to revitalize the quest for wisdom as a quality of aging, it must become part of a broader *culture* of aging

well, where aging persons shake off cultural stigma, take themselves seriously, and let their voices be heard.

The modern scientific approach that gradually emerged in the seventeenth century continued to be called "natural philosophy" for a long time, but its new scientific method took another course than the traditional philosophy, or *scientia* that it gradually got rid of, although it continued to presuppose philosophical concepts. One of the striking features of the Western tradition is that science becomes increasingly dominant in relation to other forms of knowledge, a dominance it owes mainly to its increased productivity and technological control as compared to traditional understandings of nature.

If questions can be answered clearly by using the available information or scientific resources, there is no need for wisdom. Often, however, experts disagree amongst each other about important subjects, and even when they agree, it is not always clear how a scientific statement should be applied in a specific situation. Moreover, instrumental effectiveness is not the same as its meaningful application (see also 6.3), and in those situations in which unequivocal answers cannot be found, we still need the best answer or advice we can get. To be able to answer such questions or to rephrase them in a way that is clarifying, there is a need for reflective competences that used to be educated in the wisdom traditions. Stephan Toulmin (1990), who sees the authors from the Renaissance and early modern humanism (and not philosophers like Descartes) as the pioneers of modernity, laments that their work of questioning and reflection has not been pursued with the same intensity as the development of the natural sciences. The humanities have partly taken up this task, but throughout modernity they have not been taken as seriously as the sciences, and their position in the educational system remains problematic (cf. Nussbaum 2010).

A fast pace of social change tends to undermine forms of conventional wisdom because young people may be confronted with, for instance, new social media or computer games that did not even exist when their parents were young. The parents may still be "wiser," but how can they be seen by the children as having more experience with such issues? That certain forms of behavior have been appropriate, effective, or respected in the past does not mean that they will remain so. However, knowing how to handle the newest gadgets or having many online friends does not lead to a *good life,* which was the general aim of the Greek and Roman practical philosophers, who sought to develop the care for oneself into an art of living and, eventually, of aging.

The interest in what reflection and deliberation might bring, in what "wise" judgment in a particular situation might be, can only arise if one accepts that we cannot approach all issues of life by convention, the newest trend, or "hard evidence." The shared practice of sincerely searching to deepen our understanding was not invented or constructed by philosophy in an attempt to slow down the progress toward perfect scientific clarity. Rather, activities such as philosophy and art have come into being as attempts to articulate experiences, to raise new questions, and to give shape to possible answers. The interconnection that was implied in the expression *philo-sophia* has not lost its meaning: wisdom implies an ongoing search for answers that leads to further questions, for life does neither stop when one has become aged, nor do experiences and the need to think about them come to an end. One could stick to the conclusion that as long as there is no irrefutable knowledge about these matters it makes no sense to be engaged in such questions, since they will be decided by personal taste or chance. This attitude, which hides and evades personal responsibilities, sometimes passes for "life experience" and combines well with a pragmatic attitude that says such reflections are irrelevant in terms of clearly defined plans or "targets." Here, indifference prepares the breeding ground for those late modern forces that seem to give very straightforward answers, such as the commercial world of brands, lifestyles, and other seductive images of a successful life. It is a late modern illusion to think that only traditions can be fundamentalist.

If we look back at what the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers had to say about wisdom and aging, the most important impulse still comes from Socrates, who maintained that a human life should be an *examined* life and that reflection does not lead to solid or definitive answers but to an ongoing search for more adequate answers. That there may be no definitive answers does not make the reflection of the question and its possible answers meaningless, for wherever control and definitive knowledge end, other questions emerge. In post-traditional contexts, reflective discussions will produce not authoritative or final answers but invitations to a certain way of seeing or understanding that may be worth to think about or to live with: the search for wisdom is not the same as its possession.

So indeed, "Old men ought to be explorers." But Eliot's symptomatic neglect of aging women underlines also that not everything that passes for wisdom—even if it belongs to a very old tradition or comes from very far—should be accepted or adopted indiscriminately. Neither the humanities nor the wisdom

traditions are free from power abuse or prejudice. Like other forms of knowledge, wisdom has often functioned as an apodictic legitimization of power. But self-criticism and self-irony are also ingredients of wisdom and remain essential as long as they do not degenerate to sarcasm or to the relativism of an elusive comfort zone where every "point of view" would be equally true or untrue. This does not mean that we have a tool to measure the "wisdom" of statements, or that we can develop such a tool without silently presupposing an instrumental understanding of wisdom. The challenge is rather to find an approach that can be seen as meaningful by persons who find themselves in puzzling or difficult situations where effective solutions are not available and good answers hard to find.

A re-actualization of the connection between wisdom and aging also requires paying more attention to the subtle ways in which experiences are processed as people grow older. For instance, when an older person displays fewer activities in the public sphere, her world is said to get "smaller." The contrast of large versus small may be grossly inadequate to understand the changes that actually occur. Even in a "smaller" world, events may take on a new intensity as important details that were not noticed before (for instance, because "there was no time"), may come to life and deepen the world one lives in. This may also entail that certain questions about the meaning of one's life or life "as such" become more important, whereas they hardly came to the foreground before.

This whole endeavor of making a connection between wisdom and aging presupposes that people can retain or even develop the cognitive abilities to acquire, nourish, and deepen reflection even long after they were defined as "aged." Over the last decades, research has demonstrated that aging persons may be eminently able to tolerate and approach multidimensional and polyvalent situations or questions in a fruitful way. An example of such research is the study of "post-formal rationality." The idea behind this is that research on cognitive development usually focuses on such formal abstract-logical operations as were distinguished by Piaget (2001) and have become typical of most intelligence tests. Yet there are many important questions or situations that do not lend themselves to quick yes/no decisions but require reflection. Examples of post-formal rationality, according to Sinnott (1996), are the ability to enter into the thoughts and expressions of others, the capacity to deal with problems creatively by using various approaches, and a flexible view of what is possible in difficult situations. The extensive research by the late Paul

Baltes and his colleagues at the Max Planck institute in Berlin has presented interesting examples of the development of a more pragmatically oriented intelligence that shows cognitive overlap with some aspects of wisdom, especially where answers are not readily available but have to be found in careful reflection and deliberation (Baltes and Staudinger 2000; Baltes, Glück, and Kunzmann 2002; cf. also Sternberg 1990). Based on fifty years of research on cognitive development in subsequent cohorts, Schaie (2005) has also demonstrated elaborately that learning processes are still possible at high ages and that the ability for verbal articulation shows little decline.

Others have presented inspiring perspectives on aging and wisdom. Following his work on *The Creative Age* (2000), Gene Cohen published *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain* (2005), elaborating his theory of "developmental intelligence," which is supported by evidence of the continuing interaction of myelin and axons in the brain that support the more flexible and nuanced thinking characterized by post-formal thought and wisdom in the second half of life. Another example is the work of Elkhonon Goldberg (2006), who gathered recent evidence of a continuing neurogenesis in the aging brain to combat outdated views that the brain could not renew its neurons and would be doomed to a progressive loss after its full development in young adulthood.

Leaving the presumptuous connotations of the terms "wisdom" and "wise" aside, I proposed at the beginning of this section that the traditional connection between aging and wisdom implies that aging people may acquire insights that are also valuable for younger persons. The association between aging and wisdom may become more convincing if we specify in which ways older persons are more likely to acquire important insights than younger persons.

A *first* example where aging gives an advantage over younger persons is in what may be called "deeper layers of change." A high pace of change such as is typical for late modern societies does not mean that every change confronts us with something entirely new. Usually the adjective *new* serves to call attention to something that is not new but is just presented in a different way. But when something is really new, it still needs the former situation as the background against which it can stand out as "new." Even in late modern conditions, aging persons have more opportunities than young persons to decipher developments in a longer temporal perspective and to recognize patterns of continuity and discontinuity behind the surface of daily "change."

In a situation where expert knowledge changes quickly, this may even create interesting challenges for aging experts: on the one hand, he or she might lose contact with the latest micro-developments; but on the other hand, a longer time perspective may give opportunities to rise above the small worlds of specialization and to gain an overview of the most important developments or interconnecting issues that are hard to notice when one focuses on very differentiated themes.

A *second* example of the advantage that aging persons can have is more experience in giving an adequate response to *specific* situations. Often the situational specificity conflicts with general rules or procedures so that an adequate response cannot be deduced from these rules but must come from a reflective experience with such conflicts that can be deepened through the years. Even Aristotle, who as we have seen, was quite skeptical about the qualities of "old" people, left no doubt that this kind of experience takes a long time to acquire: "[T]hough the young become proficient in geometry and mathematics, and wise in matters like these, they do not seem to become practically wise. The reason is that practical wisdom is concerned also with particular facts, and particulars come to be known from experience; and a young person is not experienced, since experience takes a long time to produce" (*NE* 1142a). Even in many professional settings this makes sense: sometimes the application of a rule to a specific situation will partly contradict other rules that should also be respected. Such situations require experience and will usually make a young person turn for advice to an older, more experienced colleague. To avoid arbitrariness in the application of rules without losing touch with the specificity of situations requires wise judgment. Although more questions may come up than can be answered, there is still a difference between a deepening awareness of the many different aspects of a situation that are brought together in a delicate balance, and a superficial, pragmatist clarity that tends toward indifference.

A *third* example of aging persons having an advantage to learn something that can also be important to younger people is the deepening awareness that the times of life are finite. Laura Carstensen and her colleagues have shown that aging persons develop attitudes, qualities, and preferences that are different from those of young people because they live in time horizons that are different (Carstensen, Mikels, and Mather 2006). However, a serious illness or accident will change one's time horizons, relatively independent of age (Hagestad 1996). At some point in their lives, aging persons will under-

stand that their remaining time is limited, and this will lead to motivations that are different from those of younger people. This theory has clarified that some characteristics of older people that were assumed to be caused by their chronometric age are actually results of differently perceived time horizons.

However, in contrast with this valuable work and more in line with the traditions that have made a connection between aging and wisdom, I am primarily interested in where other attitudes or different insights of older people could also be important to younger people because they are probably a deeper understanding of "human life." That life is finite is usually not perceived or taken seriously by young people, but in certain situations they may suddenly realize that this is not a condition of aging, but of life. This awareness affects the way life is lived; it may lead to a melancholic mood because all turns out to be temporary, but it can also lead to a deeper awareness of the intensity of finite lives. As we can see in Heidegger's work, but also in many other thinking about death, there has been a strong tendency not only to identify finitude with mortality but also to understand the confrontation with these issues as an individual challenge. Of course, this individual and highly personal confrontation cannot be evaded, but the death of the *other* remains a painful horizon of life, even if one has complete peace with one's own death. This is also revealed in the contrast between Cicero's lighthearted thoughts about death and his suffering following the death of his daughter Tullia. These two important elements will return in the following reflections.

6.3. Toward an Art of Aging: Living in Different Times

Aging is living in time and calls for an appreciation of the intricate interconnections between the past, the present, and the projected future, but it has nothing to do with preserving continuity for the sake of continuity. On the contrary, suggesting that life is just continually and solely repeating itself fails to acknowledge the creativity and diversity of human life and feeds on illusions of control. As I discussed in the fourth chapter, such an empty, endless repetition is the basis of chronometric time. Applying this in the form of ages to human populations leads to broad generalizations about age categories. Such a time perspective may be useful for specific purposes, such as establishing pension rights, but it can hardly serve as a meaningful orientation for aging as living in time. We need a deeper and broader understanding of the different times of life.

A Multi-layered Present

Philosophers of lived time have rightly emphasized that this form of time cannot be understood as a linear and homogeneous chain of infinitely small points or digits such as is typical of chronometric time. For our temporal orientation, it is crucial to be able to distinguish different experiences of the present (a conversation, a political constellation, a climate, etc.) from the past or the future. *Within* those present situations, we can still use chronometric distinctions to decide whether something was earlier, later, or simultaneous, but the experience that a certain situation (such as a conflict) is no longer present but has given way to mutual understanding does not depend on chronometric time.

One important form of lived time is an awareness of the present. Because people who live in the rich countries of the world usually don't expect to die before they have reached the age of their estimated life expectancy (which is actually a death expectancy), important lessons can be learned from people who are unexpectedly confronted with an incurable disease. As soon as they have recovered from the shock of the diagnosis, many succeed in living their lives much more intensely, being more aware of what is ultimately essential to them. This was an important theme of the Stoic philosophers who made an *art* of living in the present.

The Stoics shared with the followers of Epicurus an important ingredient of practical wisdom: living life day by day. According to Marcus Aurelius, we can only live in the present, and only the present can be lost: "Though you were to live three thousand, or, if you please, thirty thousand of years, yet remember that no man can lose any other life than that which he now lives, neither is he possessed of any other than that which he loses. Whence it follows that the longest life, as we commonly speak, and the shortest, come all to the same reckoning. For the present is of the same duration everywhere. Everybody's loss, therefore, is of the same bigness, and reaches no further than to a point of time, for no man is capable of losing either the past or the future; for how can one be deprived of what he has not?" (M. Aurelius 2005, 29; cf. Hadot 2009).

The value of these Stoic perspectives is an intense awareness of the preciousness and fullness of life that is more likely to arise in a situation in which it was much more difficult to ward off disability, disease, and death. However, this message does not lose its importance because we live longer lives and do

not feel as helpless in the face of worsening eyesight, bad hearing, infections, or appendicitis.

Hadot (1995) advocates the philosophy of the Stoics as presenting an art of living that would still be capable of answering major questions of life. What may be learned from the Stoic spiritual exercises (as from other practices of meditation) is, indeed, to pay more attention to what is happening here and now without being stuck in the past or in needless worrying what the future might hold in store for us. However, the exclusive attention for the present as the only reality that would matter "here and now" neglects an important temporal perspective: the interweaving and complexity of the threefold present with its ever-changing references to the past and the future that was advanced by Augustine and modern thinkers about time such as Husserl and Heidegger. Although this aspect was not well-developed, it was not absent from Stoic thought, as we can learn from Seneca's portrait of the wise man who does not complain that his life is too short: "Should a period of time have passed, he embraces it in his memory; if it is present, he makes use of it; if it is to come, he anticipates it. By combining all times into one, he makes his life a long one" (Seneca 2007, 150ff., 157).

According to Augustine, the threefold present implies that the past is present in my memories and the future in my anticipations. At its temporal borders the present is constantly emptied of impressions and filled with new ones as what "still" is merges into "not anymore" and what is "already" interweaves with "not yet." Moreover, living in the present implies inevitably moving into an anticipated future and relating to the past. There are no watertight sheds between the past, the present, and the future; the richness of the present is that it can integrate references to both past and future. I may be speaking with somebody now, but in this "now" is taken into account whether we have never met before or met quite often, which will change the way we are speaking with each other, just as it will make a difference whether a conversation stands on its own or is seen as the first of many other possible conversations in the future. Moreover, when we speak about the past or the future, this changes the situations that are *made* present in the conversation. In continuing the conversation, I remember how it began, I may have memories of other encounters that were the same or the opposite, and I may anticipate its ending or its continuation in the future.

Such *lived* time in its changing dynamic configurations of present, past, and future is not "less exact" than chronometric measurements; it implies a dif-

ferent time perspective. The very different experiential qualities of situations with the same chronometric durations give instructive examples: waiting for three hours can be very long, and a party of three hours very short. Einstein's quip that spending an hour with a nice girl may seem like a minute, whereas sitting on a hot stove for a minute may seem like an hour also falls in this category. However, just as the experiential difference implies more than just the *duration* of situations, the chronometric vocabulary of "short" and "long" does not suffice to express the diversity of temporal qualities. Somebody who has experienced dramatic but short events such as earthquakes or very intense personal encounters knows that from the standpoint of experience it is pointless to state that what happened took only ten seconds. This fails completely to grasp the temporal intensity of such occurrences in which movements may suddenly appear to be extremely slow or to have other qualities which set them apart from regular life.

Kairos: A Sensitivity for Changing Temporal Qualities

In Greek culture the approach to time included the central importance of the "right time," or *kairos,* a concept that can already be found in works of early Greek poets such as Hesiod (8th century BC) and Pindar (522–443 BC) and forms the qualitative opposite of *chronos,* the quantitative, measurement-oriented form of time. Whereas *chronos* is usually portrayed as an old god with a long grey beard (and sometimes with wings, because "time flies"), *kairos* is personified as a young god who always comes at the right moment but passes by swiftly, so you must take the opportunity to profit from his blessed presence. The invitation to catch his attention is represented by a lock of hair on his forehead. Once you grab it, his swift movements will come to a rest and he will show his agreeable appearance. But when he has passed, he becomes hard and impossible to catch, because the back of his head is bald and he rarely returns to give humans a second chance.

We have seen in the fourth chapter that Aristotle already had a sophisticated concept of chronometric time that was grounded in the regular movements of the heavenly bodies. But in connection with *kairos,* the rhythms of nature were used to sensitize human beings to become *attentive* to nature's subtle and irregular play of opportunities and limitations. Here, intimate knowledge of nature's movements formed the background for a sensitive appraisal of the changing *uniqueness* of the moment. Moreover, the right moment was not seen as determined by man; it was given (by the gods, as the Greeks used to

say). So humans could not *control* it, but they might take advantage of the moment by following its *kairos* "as a hired servant but not as a slave." Aristotle, who was the son of a doctor, emphasized the importance of *kairos* since there can be no universal "set of rules . . . agents must always look at what is appropriate in each case as it happens, as do doctors and navigators (*NE* 1104a). *Kairos* forms an essential part of the refined premodern ways of the Greeks to become more sensitive to what they could not control. Since their way of life was inextricably bound up with the sea, the Greeks were familiar with the fact that there are good (*eukairia*) and bad moments (*akairia*) to put out to sea or to undertake other actions that need a certain harmony with changing natural conditions. The vulnerable ships were not leaving according to a chronometric schedule as would be the case in contemporary situations where ships have more technological refinement.

This temporal concept of *kairos* is independent from chronometric time. The knowledge that "this is the right time" can only come from a sensitivity to the situational opportunities of the moment. The Latin equivalent of *kairos* is *opportunus,* which refers to a small opening (*porta*) where one can pass through to enter the richness of the right time (Kerkhoff 1973). In contemporary culture there are still traces of this notion of time: "This is not the right time to speak to him about this" or "If you want to do it, do it now" or "It's now or never." But technological control over many situations and the tendency to rely on chronometric planning has not stimulated the development of this temporal sensitivity.

Activism and Receptivity

We should think once more about what experiencing the present means, because in an activist perspective the present also appears to be the only time that matters. It is the temporal domain in which we act; we can only do something in the present, "here and now." Postponing an act only means doing it in a "now" that has been projected into a future: I can only answer the phone, go for a ride, or listen to a story now. The activity of planning is future-oriented, but in the sense of placing the "now-moments" of activities in a chronometric continuum. We see this happening as our agendas are filling up with things to do at a certain now-moment in the future. Depending on the time we want to invest in the specific item that figures on the agenda, it is granted a certain amount of time that may happen to be adequate or not. In the last case, it may be difficult to devote more time to it because the agenda

is already filled with too many things to do. In the activist tunnel of time, the span of attention is limited to what has to be done. The dominance of chronometric time has something to do with the dominance of activist approaches that characterize the central domains of late modern society. Although each problem presents another reason to support such activism, it also tends to obscure crucial domains of human lives. Activist approaches tend to hide the *receptivity* of life, obscuring how we experience what happens to us in trying to carry out subsequent tasks.

Memories Have Their Own Times

We may be able to establish when Plato or Stoics like Cicero lived and how long they lived, but this perspective on time does not give a clue about *why* their thoughts can still speak to us. Clearly, cultural memories in which recent thoughts are forgotten but very old ones can be very alive do not follow chronometric distinctions. Questions that live in the present follow different historical tracks in looking for answers. Similarly, personal memories do not work according to chronometric time: something that happened "a long time ago" (from a chronometric perspective) can be vividly remembered as if it happened yesterday, whereas something that happened a month ago can be completely forgotten or experienced as way back in the past. As we have seen in chapter 4, Husserl tried to derive chronometric time from the time that is constituted in personal memories, but this failed because of the fundamental difference between these perspectives in scope or extension. Another reason for such a failure is that memories do not follow orderly linear arrangements. Of course, the temporal creativity of memories does not exclude the possibility of locating remembered situations and experiences in chronometric time. When we do this, we can wonder about the differences between these perspectives: "Has it been so long ago? It seems like yesterday!" or "Was this last month? It seems years ago."

The present has deep temporal layers that are filled with references to the past and anticipations of the future. My past still structures my present being and my future possibilities, regardless of whether I regret lost opportunities or feel privileged because it has taken me to an excellent position from which I can venture further into the future. As Heidegger emphasized, the openness of the future is not an abstract openness in which "everything is possible"; such is the reality of commercial slogans, not of human life. The specific qualities of my existence open a future that is different from the future of other persons

with their own pasts. Being oriented toward a future always implies that one has already lived in a past and is actually living in the present reality of a life world.

In that sense, the past is still present and the future we anticipate is not completely unstructured or open; moreover, the projected future "backfires" on the present since what we hope and strive for also shapes what we do "now" and experience as "present." The future that confronts me also influences the things I remember. I may remember that the last time I tried to do what I plan to do now, I had a wonderful experience or that I failed; or I may see what lies ahead as something "new" because I cannot recall having experienced anything like it.

Actions Constitute Time

If we extend our investigation of aging and time from anonymous physical or biological processes such as senescing, to historical, social, psychological, or existential issues, we have to take into account that human actions and interactions play a major role: they not only *take* time (which can be measured), but they also *constitute* time (Baars 1997; Mittelstrass 1992). Life worlds, situations, and actions have their own temporal qualities: a good conversation about important issues will take some time, but we don't know how much when we begin.

There is an old philosophical idea, grounded in experience, that walking and creative thinking go well together because walking changes the experiential context, including time. The contemporary culture of living with time, on the other hand, could be described with the metaphor of the short distance runner, who is always competing in chronometric time even when there are no competitors. He can still compete with them because their identities are represented by the times they have realized in running the particular distance. For the running athlete, chronometric time is decisive, especially in its finest parts, which can only be captured through refined instruments so that he cannot know what time he has realized before the instruments speak. That these athletes, especially the top sprinters, are the biggest stars of the world of sports because they represent "the fastest man or woman on earth" tells us something about a culture in which speed and acceleration are valued highly. Walking, however, has been associated since early Greek philosophy with a clear but freely wandering mind. The members of the Aristotelian school were also called "peripatetic" or walking philosophers, and there are

many examples from the history of philosophy and spirituality that thoughts not only become clearer but heavy emotional burdens can get lighter, unnecessary problems disappear, and creative new angles arise. Many postmodern nomadic philosophers who have become rootless improvisers without a clear sense of direction can be seen as walking thinkers.

In contrast to the idolized athlete, there is no reason to be competitive while walking, although this is still possible if somebody cannot rid himself of that habit. Exploring and enjoying the surroundings usually goes well with enjoying each other's company. On long hikes, one often carries the backpack of a companion because it is easier to get something out of your own backpack. Wandering also gives a time for thoughts and memories of important experiences to come if there are no distractions. There can be goals as you are walking, but the meaning of walking is not to arrive at a goal. It is an impractical way of getting somewhere, and anyway, the goal will be to come home. This kind of walking is not just about physical fitness; it's about an attitude: even if somebody pushes you in a wheelchair or if you are a long distance runner, you can have the experience of walking, which is also another experience of time.

A good walk will have its own temporal dynamics, just as do reading a good book, hurrying to catch a plane, or playing with a child. Listening to a string quartet constitutes temporal experiences that differ from participating in an intense political discussion, even if these experiences have the same chronometric duration. If we take care of somebody, this process has its own temporal dynamics, from establishing personal contact to the more instrumental parts such as giving an injection. Both the interpersonal part and the more instrumental part may show unexpected problems or needs and may, consequently, change the temporal dimensions of specific situations of care. Even in establishing standardized times for these activities we would have to look first at the specific character of activities and then measure their (average) duration. Activities create their own temporal order, and the persons who are involved in them can experience that they are complete and rounded off at a certain moment, not earlier or later. Of course, they can be forcefully standardized or rushed, but then this becomes part of the experience of the situation. For many persons who work in professional care, such a standardized rush is a daily reality. Their working hours can be filled with activities that are not really satisfying because their time budgets have been developed without

much sensitivity and respect for the temporal qualities (and demands) of important events or actions in life (see 1.3).

It is hard to develop such a temporal sensitivity if one remains caught in chronometric time. From a managerial standpoint, from which time budgets have been implemented, it may be objected that it is not possible to control the time of workers in any other way. This may be a problem, but it may also be asked whether such a managerial approach is always adequate, especially in life world situations such as giving care to other persons. Because we are living in different times, at some points we may need an abstract time in order to coordinate our actions, but this chronometric time should not dominate our lives.

Life Events and Life's Periods

An important part of understanding someone's life or process of aging is to understand how life may change after major life events: the birth of a (grand) child, a new home, illness, the loss of a parent or partner. In that sense we can distinguish different periods in life: the time of being pregnant, the time of having small children, the time of a divorce, or the time of mourning. All of these times have specific experiential qualities and images: love, affection, happiness, or mourning not only require time to develop but also qualify and color times, so that we can speak of happy times or times of loneliness. Of course, as soon as life events have happened we can put a date on them, but that does not mean that the age or the time has determined the event. In research, chronometric measurements can be used to document major events as they occur and can establish the average ages of typical life events, but this can only be done in retrospect. Living and aging do not follow chronometric time.

The Times of Life Are Finite

> See how they desire to live long! Worn-out old men pray like street-beggars for the addition of a few years; they pretend to be younger than they are; they flatter themselves with lies and get as much pleasure from self-deception as if they were deceiving fate as well as themselves. When finally some weakness has reminded them of their mortality, how fearfully they meet death, as though they are not quitting life but been dragged away from it! They shout repeatedly that they have been fools, as they have not really lived. . . . That is when they reflect

> on how pointlessly they have toiled to gain what they did not enjoy, how all their effort has been utterly wasted. (Seneca 2007, 150f.)

Epicurean and Stoic philosophers about the art of living have warned their audiences not to spoil life out of fear of death. Early modern thinkers such as Petrarch (1304–1374) and Montaigne (1533–1592) have repeated this message that fear of death can be avoided because death is unavoidable (Baars and Dohmen, forthcoming). For them, the meaning of fear was that it might help to avoid the danger the fear focuses on; but in the case of death, this does not make sense. Seneca and Montaigne are used to looking death in the face and have little compassion with those who complain that they have to die; they see this behavior as a waste of time and believe that those who waste the time of their lives do not really deserve to live any longer. If they were granted a longer life, they would still not know how to enjoy it. And anyway, because we will be dead an eternity, living a little longer or shorter would not make a difference. Seneca stresses that he does not experience his life as short, because he does not allow time to be taken from him as do those *occupati* who let themselves be carried away by the course of events and the many things to do. Thus, the beginning of the Stoic art of life is the *acceptance* of the inevitability of death.

More Epicurean is the strategy to *ignore* death because it is not a part of life. According to Epicurus, we will never meet death, because as long as we live, death is absent, and when death arrives, we are not there anymore. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* Wittgenstein (1974) repeats this Epicurean statement: "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death" (6.4311).

The awareness that the times of life are finite changes something in the way living in time is experienced, because the finitude of time has something important to tell about life. However, the Epicurean and Stoic traditions have tended to see death merely as one's *own* death, whereas the death of *others* who are dear to us will be fully experienced and remain a painful horizon of vulnerable life. In the last section I will explore these issues further, trying to bring finitude more into life experience instead of associating it directly and exclusively with death as has been the predominant approach throughout history.

A Last Question about the Beginning of Time

The terms "chronometric age" and "calendar age" are mostly used interchangeably, but they have a different background. Actually, the calendar gives

chronometric time much of its meaningful structure. We have seen that it is very difficult to answer the question of what time is "as such," but this becomes even more difficult when we apply the perspective of time to "itself." Questions that are inherent in time, even the most simple ones, such as "When did this begin?" show their profoundly uprooting character as soon as they are applied to time "itself." For how and when did time begin? We can even ask what might have been before the Big Bang, a question that cannot even be posed within the perspective of chronometric time. Physics as a whole, as we know it, would break down and give up in confrontation with the singular moment of the Big Bang (Penrose 2010).

It is interesting to see how these simple but enigmatic questions were approached by the major premodern calendars that are still operating in the late modern world. Their answer, simply put, is that beginning is not a matter of chronometric time but that the idea or metaphor of *beginning* gives chronometric time its historical hold and context. Typically, calendars revolve around a major occurrence that opens time in an emphatically "new" sense that gives chronometric time a zero point from which it can begin to count the years. This occurrence is regarded as so important that it inaugurates a new era: a "new beginning" that is often seen as a decisive manifestation of the Absolute into the finite human world. In this way, dating in the Christian calendar starts with the birth of Christ, but in the Muslim calendar it starts with the *Hedshra,* the flight of Mohammed to Medina, and in the Jewish tradition with the meta-historical event of "God's creation of the world." The inauguration of a "new beginning" is internally related to narratives about the beginning ("creation") and ending of the world ("the end of times") and gives meaning to the time of the world and the human beings in it between their beginning (birth) and end (death).

Different calendars can be coordinated in an instrumental way by using chronometric time. The common chronometric units (years, months) make it possible to transpose age-related calculations from one calendar to another. The Christian year 2010 can be transposed into the Jewish year 5770 or the Muslim year 1431, and the ages of people can be counted in much the same way within and beyond the different calendars. However, this does not mean that calendars only have a chronometric meaning or that the differences between calendars can be eliminated by arithmetic. Chronometric time needs a calendar or it would not know where to begin. In spite of their chronometric structure, calendars are not only used to count the years as we do when

we speak of calendar age; they show how chronometric time is embedded in cultural narratives. Living within the horizon of such a culturally specific calendar also has consequences for the understanding of aging as living in time. Moreover, the temporal horizons that we find in different cultural interpretations of aging are not static but also changing over time.

This is a point of increasing importance as globalization involves the migration of people through different cultural environments (Phillipson 2005; Torres 2005) that are embedded in different calendars. Neither time nor age is only a matter of arithmetic. Even if the religious origin of the zero point may have sunk into the background, such a secularization does not necessarily mean that *cultural* differences in a broad sense, which are related to different calendars, have become unimportant, although this may be the impression of those who assume that their particular calendar has become universal.

As calendars are absorbed by specific cultures, they are enriched with national or regional elements. They structure "the year" as a recurring period with religious and national holidays, seasonal festivities, markets, or contests. The yearly cycles and the rhythms of the natural environment are coordinated with specific seasonal activities such as fishing, sowing, and harvesting but also going to the beach when it's hot or socializing in warm homes during cold and dark winters. In this way cultural representations of living through a year are highly colored by specific characteristics of regions and traditions that are typically transferred by socialization (Zerubavel 1981). Seasons have often been projected onto the life course, but seasons can have different forms and human imagination has not remained within any immutable pattern of nature. Instead of four seasons we can also find astrologically inspired phases such as Ptolemy's interpretation of the seven phases of the life course. Phases of life have also been articulated in terms of chronometric age, such as in Solon's poem at the beginning of the third chapter, but this usually remains accidental or of secondary importance. Chronometric age was not seen as regulating the phases, as nature or the planets were assumed to do, but it was loaded with symbolic content or served as a conventional marker of subsequent phases. The basic idea has been that "life" has its distinct phases and that they are *meaningfully* distinct from each other as they represent or embody different meanings.

The premodern calendar with its narratives about the meanings of life and the universe prepared a "natural" place for aging persons as carriers and teachers of rituals, values, or wisdom. Such positions of respect will fade away as

traditions lose their force unless they are meaningfully reinterpreted in contemporary contexts. Traditions cannot be immune from criticism, since they are often infused with ethnocentric and gender-biased dictates which come under pressure as situations change and as communication reaches beyond the cultural boundaries that kept traditional institutions intact (Baars and Thomése 1994; Settersten 2003).

As traditional representations are seen as outdated and unfit to give meaning to lives in an increasingly complex and differentiated world where people want to choose their own ways of living, chronometric time tends to remain as the *only* time perspective that is shared with other people. The calendars and yearly cycles of festivities and transitions also tend to be seen from a chronometric perspective—as dates in the agenda that must be incorporated and efficiently dealt with by chronometric planning or "time management." But there is no chronometric reason to celebrate anything; in the perspective of the clock, any moment is the same as any other. This leads to paradoxical situations as people are rushing in and out of celebrations that were originally meant to tone down the importance of chronometric time.

The calendar reminds us that chronometric time needs a meaningful structure that cannot be derived from its measurements. Without a meaningful beginning, it would not even know when to begin. Beginning does not depend on a fixed point in an agenda, but it inaugurates agendas: life begins now, again but anew.

6.4. Toward an Art of Aging: Beyond Longer Lives

> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference. ROBERT FROST, "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN"

As I have observed before, throughout history death has been a subject of intense debate and reflection, while discussions about aging have been scarce. One important reason for this lopsided attention is that throughout history death was much more part of everyday life and would strike at all ages, while mortality has over the last century gradually been concentrated in later life. Philosophical thought about aging has not kept up with the changes. In the preceding chapters I have drawn on texts of Greek and Roman thinkers about

aging that emerged from practically oriented traditions of ancient philosophy in their search for a good life as well as on extended philosophical debates about time and narrative. In this last section I will discuss how a long tradition of thinking about the "finitude of life" might be interpreted in a new way so that it can be included in an inspiring perspective on aging.

Aging as Finitization: A Deepening of Unique Lives

As a result of the traditional fascination with death and a concomitant neglect of aging, "finitude" is usually understood as *mortality,* which is not unimportant but must be extended to the different times in which we live and age. Throughout history, poets, theologians, and philosophers have been overwhelmed by the experience that everything that exists, all that we are and do, is futile because sooner or later, this will all be gone. Here, the futility and vanity of all these persons who think they are so important stare us in the face. Life seems just a short period during which we are under the illusion that our activities and personal views really matter, but they rest on nothing more than an all-too-short breath of life. The message for those who are already "aged" is that their lives are even shorter: they are well advised to prepare for their deaths.

In transforming the awareness that our lives are finite into an inspiring perspective for aging, I do not intend to diminish the importance of death as the last horizon of this life that we live. I will, however, turn this perspective around and feed its intensity back into life. Instead of concluding that mortal life is hardly important because after a while we will all be dead, I would emphasize that every moment gets a special depth and every life a quality of uniqueness *because* our times are finite. Emphasizing the finitude of life can also increase the intensity with which we live it. Even Heidegger's thought about "Being to Death" (4.4) is not just a death cult but intends to open Being for its authentic possibilities. When we realize that the times of our lives are limited, we become aware that we must *live* these short lives and face the challenges and opportunities that are most essential to us.

In contrast to Heidegger's approach, I will underline not only the constitutive importance of other people for our lives but also the ongoing significance of finitude for the different situations and phases of life. The extension of finitude to the different times in which we live and age leads to the elaboration of the perspective of *finitization:* the underlying idea that the inevitability of change can inspire us to appreciate the uniqueness of persons and situations

as they are changing over time (Baars 1997; 2002; 2010a, b). There is a deep connection between finitude and individual uniqueness. The fact that persons and situations will not remain the same highlights the particular qualities and limitations of individuals at particular moments, their relationships with others in specific situations, and the uniqueness of all this. Of course, everything is temporary, but this is precisely what makes life so important. The easy association between aging and finitude in the limited sense of mortality tends to occlude the finitude that pervades human life as we live it. Even being young does not offer any guarantees: statistics about life expectancy are just long-term generalizations. The wish to ignore finitude not only during youth but also during "normal" adulthood leads to an abstract image of a normalized world that excludes those abnormal persons who do not fit these images.

In *The Fragility of Goodness,* Martha Nussbaum (2001) refers to Odysseus's passionate embrace of finite, mortal life at the very moment that he is offered not only a pleasant life but even immortality. In Homer's *Odyssey* the hero Odysseus finds himself on the island of the wonderful goddess Calypso under whose spell he has been for several years. The Olympic gods, however, force Calypso to set him free. Thus, he is faced with a far-reaching choice: either he can continue to share his life with the beautiful and ageless Calypso and will not die, or he will have to leave her island and may have to fight for his life in order to return to his home on the island of Ithaca. Odysseus answers Calypso that he longs to return to his wife and prefers a mortal life, although he does not look forward to all the dangers he may have to face. But, he emphasizes, he has "a heart in his breast," which helped him to endure the sufferings of the past, so he will endure what is to come. This episode is very interesting when compared with the many stories about paradises where eternal life was lost in punishment of sinful behavior. Odysseus decides in favor of a finite and vulnerable life: a profound choice with far-reaching implications. If everything could always be postponed, nothing would really matter. Only in a finite life can something be really at stake and can life gain its full depth in this very moment.

An important limitation of the *Odyssey* and many later fairy-tales and legends is that all attention tends to be focused on the struggle of the young hero with a daunting adversary such as a Cyclops, dragon, giant, or magician. After victory comes the reward when the hero receives what he fought for. Odysseus returns home and is reunited with his wife; the prince puts the princess on his white horse "and they live happily ever after." What happened after

the fight is apparently not worth mentioning, although this is what the fight was all about. Although the activist struggle for life entails more sensation, most recounted adventures turn around the endangered freedom and dignity of human lives, and there is no reason to remain stuck at the sensational level.

Likewise, aging life may offer more opportunities and unexpected exciting challenges than are foreseen in a career-oriented planning of the life course. By focusing less in a managerial manner on chronometric time and age, other dimensions of time may open up so that life can remain an adventure (which is not the same as a struggle). In other words, the adventure of life does not only unfold in youth and "normal" adulthood but also in later life.

Unique Lives: Empirical and Ethical

We inevitably begin our lives in specific circumstances: with this body, with these parents, in this time and age, in this part of the world. Being born with specific bodily characteristics, with both weak and strong points, is something we can only undergo, although it will have major consequences. Human beings are born into circumstances that support, frustrate, crush, or inspire them. Living implies a constant confrontation with situations that "present themselves": a beautiful morning, a nice message, an accident, or an interesting encounter. In this permanent interweaving of passivity and activity, we are confronted with the finitude of life every day: since I am here, I cannot be somewhere else; if I stay indoors to do this, I cannot go out and do something else; I have only this body, not another one. Unique sequences of situations and actions that lead to characteristic patterns in someone's life belong to the empirical reference of what I call "finitization." This uniqueness of life becomes more striking in the longer term: "*knowing how way leads on to way.*" There were many other educational opportunities, but I only realized this one. I might have met another partner had I been somewhere else at that crucial moment, but "*I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*"

One of the characteristics of late modern culture is that we are constantly enlarging the possibilities for participating in situations that are far away in geographical terms. When I am in Amsterdam, I can at the same time chat with somebody in Singapore, while being on the phone with a friend in New York. However, I remain finite and cannot be in Amsterdam, Singapore, and New York at the same time, and this still makes a difference. As a result of this constant finitization, aging implies on a factual level an increasing individualization of experiences resulting from an interplay between, on the one hand,

the passivity of life, in which I undergo what happens to me, and on the other hand, the formative activity of my preferences, habits, choices, and decisions.

What are the *ethical* implications of this perspective? First of all, it requires a modesty regarding the many broad generalizations about "the aged" that conflict with the unique complexity of their lives. Each person grew up in specific circumstances and has been enriched, as well as possibly scarred, by his or her experiences. As people get older, this complexity increases rather than decreases. This basic characteristic of life challenges all generalizations about "the aged" or "the elderly" that pin them down to something abstract such as a number of years or a disability. Counterevidence can often be found nearby: the more we become interested in a person, the greater the complexity of his or her motives and actions appears to be, and the more hesitant we become to put a label on them. All too often, generalizations about age categories and their averages ignore the diversity among older people. Their voices have become very thin in the many large-scale inventories of "the elderly" and their "measured" characteristics, where much is said *about* them and too little *by* them. Moreover, much that is said by them has been pre-structured by the research format. Similarly, the development of policies for "the elderly" is a precarious task to be carried out with discretion, since changes in policy or organizational formats must be incorporated in practical orientations that cannot be decided one-sidedly but should be determined together with those involved.

This perspective on the life course calls us to acknowledge the uniqueness of each person's life and to develop an understanding of living in time that is open to the present but does not forget the past or fail to anticipate the future. Such attention for unique lives does not have to end in the narrowness of narcissism, because the meanings of one's life are usually deeply connected with the lives of others even when they are painfully missed. The ethical side of finitization is the call to find an adequate response to whoever and whatever one encounters in specific situations. Of course it is possible to be indifferent to the specific qualities of persons or situations and to let life pass by. In that case, indifference is the way life is lived; there is no possibility of an objective experiment during which we step out of time. In that sense we cannot withdraw from life.

In an ethical sense, finitization also implies that I cannot let another person replace me in situations where *I* am needed or in matters which depend on *me*. Deciding in which situations I am needed does not depend on me alone,

however, since we are, after all, also irreplaceable to others. This is the proverbial seriousness of life that does not mean, of course, that it must be serious all the time. Ultimately, as the saying goes, you only live once. The beginning of an art of aging is not to spoil or waste your life. This does not involve surrendering to a hyper-culture of sensations, aiming at ever more outrageous experiences. In such a culture, the experiential space in which these events take place is filled to the brim with incentives that demand attention. The point is not to let life pass by, but to continue to live it attentively in the realization that finitude does not imply—as it might seem from the standpoint of an imagined observer who remains uninvolved—that life would be pointless or devoid of meaning, because there would be nothing new under the boring sun. On the contrary, precisely because life passes by, its unique importance can only be valued within and through its finite situations.

The finitude of human life also asserts itself beyond a limited focus on death in "limit situations" *(Grenzsituationen)* (Jaspers 1971) such as depression, sorrow, disease, loss and suffering—not only one's own but also of beloved others. The occurrence of such limit situations does not depend on chronometric age but is part of human life as such. Even a young child may become seriously ill or lose a parent or a friend. Loss, suffering, and death are inherent in human life; we can try to avoid or postpone these experiences, but we cannot eradicate them from our lives. In this sense, we cannot change limit situations but they will change *us*. As the German philosopher Karl Jaspers emphasizes, the way we should confront them is not through planning and calculation but through becoming *ourselves* in surrendering acceptance. However, as in Heidegger's resolute confrontation with death, there is an almost heroic tendency, a melancholic counterpart to "successful aging," to idealize suffering as if this were the only way to live authentically. If one would become oneself in confrontation with limit situations, as Jaspers maintains, the question arises whether one does not have a self before that. It is important to acknowledge the *dignity* of suffering but also to say that if we are not suffering so much, this does not mean that we fail to lead a fully human life. Moreover, I would maintain that limit situations that change us include more positive limit situations such as experiences of love, solidarity, friendship, or becoming a (grand)parent.

There are, however, still good reasons to heed the vulnerability of the interhuman condition, for the highly cultivated ability of the Western world to cure diseases, create safer environments, and postpone dying has created

the illusion that people suffer or die because the efforts to help them have failed. Although this can also be the case, eventually human life runs against its inherent limitations. The highly specialized and often effective technology tends to obscure this insecure character of the interhuman condition and to create the illusion that people are dying because medical technology has not yet found the means to cure the diseases they are dying from (Hayflick and Moody 2002). To explain more fully what I mean by personal uniqueness in aging, I will briefly elaborate two aspects.

The first aspect that is important in my perspective is that personal uniqueness not only has a descriptive sense of a "unique biography" but also denotes creativity and transcendence of existing situations. There is nothing wrong with reminiscence, but it is usually given too much prominence in relation to aging and tends to neglect that older persons still live in the present and move into the future. Looking back on unique lives is just one aspect of aging. I question, therefore, the predominant tendency to *document* personal uniqueness in an autobiographical retrospection that seeks descriptive completeness in telling the story of one's life (see also 5.2). Whereas the retrospective attention for situations of the past, such as childhood, is an important part of living a finite life, retrospection also aims at an integration of past experiences in the present and anticipated future: in that sense we also can say that a *closure* of past situations finds its meaning in *opening*. This re-opening of past experiences makes it possible that desires, fantasies, and wishes of the past become revitalized and play a role again in actual life. In this way the child, the adolescent, and all the other figures from the past may, in a sense, remain part of the person who lives in time and continue to take part in his or her life.

Here, uniqueness interacts with hope and transcendence: we remain finite, but we don't know in advance what our possibilities and potentials are. For the philosopher Hannah Arendt, the human condition is characterized by "natality": we are not in the world to die but to be *born*. "With each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. . . . [E]ach child is a miracle which saves the world" (1958, 178). All human beings are endowed with the capacity to begin, to start something new, and to do the unexpected. In that sense each day is not only a unique present but also a *new* day that breaks out of reproductive cycles. Natality is not only something that happens at birth, but it qualifies human lives from birth to death, inspiring life with hope, creativity, critique, rebirth, and the emergence of new horizons.

The second aspect I want to mention is that personal uniqueness presup-

poses others: social and cultural contexts that enable, limit, and challenge the ways in which personal uniqueness may come to expression. Aging is not an individualistic project that remains isolated from other people; it is always situated in a life world and confronted with systemic structures and processes. Even extreme loneliness presupposes the importance of other persons who are painfully missed. Moreover, as we appreciate the unique path we have taken, we can also discover more general patterns or developments, problems, and challenges that are far from unique. Uniqueness always presupposes a more general constitutive context which makes it possible and against which it stands out in its uniqueness. This tension or dialectic between uniqueness and universality is also inherent in trying to understand what aging is. On the one hand, there are no human lives in general: there is no birth, growing up, aging, or dying apart from specific persons. On the other hand, to be able to even speak or write about these experiences and to understand what "birth" or "aging" mean implies that there are more general patterns or regularities that can deepen our understanding in confrontation with unique persons in specific situations.

One way to approach aging meaningfully would be to see it as a process of understanding what it is to be *human:* to have experienced what it is to be young, to grow up, and to go through different situations or phases and to try to grasp what the most crucial or vital aspects are. To a certain extent it will be inevitable to make the mistake of projecting one's own understanding and experiences on situations of other persons who are equally unique. To begin from one's own prejudices is, as philosophers such as Gadamer have shown, a hermeneutical necessity. Becoming gradually aware of my prejudices is the only way to develop more understanding of other situations, because my life, my experiences, and my understanding form the necessary horizons from which I can try to approach human life in a more general sense. Instead of presuming to begin at a universal level, which would be nothing more than elevating my lived experience to the only pattern that counts, I remain caught in a process of going back and forth between specifics and glimpses of a more general pattern. In this sense ethnocentricity is unavoidable, but it should also be reflectively restrained, because no human biography or human culture can claim to represent humanity.

This respect for other contexts and cultures does not necessarily lead to indifference in which major inequalities, curable diseases, or elderly abuse are seen as typical characteristics of other cultures that need to be respected. Many

problems, both inside our own countries and abroad, are not the inevitable consequences of aging but can be solved if there is an eye that sees them, a voice that speaks for them, and efforts to help them.

Contingent and Existential Limitations

Here we must make an important distinction between what I like to call *contingent* limitations and *existential* limitations. Contingent limitations are limitations that are neither inherent to human life nor inevitable in senescing, such as poor housing conditions, insufficient care, starvation, or ageism. They may be the result of lack of knowledge, the unintended consequences of certain policies, or caused by a lack of interest or respect for the well-being of older persons. Refusing to accept such limitations and trying to make improvements remain important tasks that should not be taken lightly; it remains an important domain for critical gerontology (Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006). There are, however, *existential* limitations and vulnerabilities that are inherent in human life and will manifest themselves inevitably as people live longer. In a culture that celebrates aging as a vital part of life, these two different kinds of limitations must be distinguished from each other or they will lead to lopsided approaches to aging. When all limitations are seen as *existential* limitations, aging persons have to accept all circumstances, however dreadful. The mantra in response to any problem or limitations would be: "It's your age." For many important problems, this is too easy: often situations can be improved and people can be helped. However, when all limitations are seen as *contingent* limitations—a tendency of late modernity—the illusion develops that one should not have to accept any limitation, that any problem can be solved if given the time, money, and the determination to do it. In extreme cases, as we have seen in the second chapter, even senescing and death would not be exceptions.

Both of these one-sided approaches distort the reality: either they underestimate our capacity to be creative in overcoming difficulties, or they underestimate the finitude of life. This does not mean that limitations cannot shift: many of the existential limitations that premoderns confronted, such as bad eyesight, deafness, or certain infections, later turned out to be contingent and could be helped. However, this does not make this distinction superfluous: limitations that cannot be changed in any given situation must be faced as existential limitations, and there is little comfort in the idea that they may be overcome in some distant future.

The potential for change indicates that it is not always easy to make the distinction between contingent and existential limitations. For instance, people are confronted with profound questions such as: Will this severe chemotherapy or this highly risky surgery really lead to a better life, or should I concentrate on living the last phase of my life in my home instead of dying in a technological environment? Deciding whether a limitation must be seen as contingent or existential will often require one to reflect with human sensitivity on persons in specific situations. Celebrating aging as a vital part of life implies the acknowledgment of the potentials *and* limitations, the pleasures *and* sufferings, the continuing vitality, competence, *and* vulnerability of aging.

Improving the quality of human aging depends on both sides of the spectrum, and although late modern society demonstrates that life can be improved in many important ways, human life in general and human aging in particular pose more questions than social policy or the sciences can answer, because they aim at achieving more control and have less to offer where control fails. Such situations occur throughout life but will become inevitable when people live longer. Developing an art of aging, therefore, not only entails sustaining or enlarging the possibilities to exercise control over certain situations but also developing meaningful ways of encountering situations in life that *cannot* be controlled. Late modern cultures of aging often have difficulty acknowledging and *dignifying* limitations that cannot be overcome but must be respectfully and creatively integrated in ways of living. Acknowledging the dignity of *existential* limitations is essential for the quality of living with them. When all control-oriented approaches fail and have lost their meaning, we need the precious and hard-to-find words of wisdom that may help, encourage, and comfort us. The art of aging requires the sciences *and* the humanities, technology *and* expressive creativity, efficiency *and* reflection, remedy *and* poetry.

Why Do We Age? How Can Aging Be Meaningful?

To explore the meaning of life and its "limit situations," it is helpful to distinguish different ways of asking Why? A first way is to ask in terms of *causality:* "Why did I injure my knee? Because I fell"; "Why did I fall? Because I lost my balance"; "Why did I lose my balance?" and so forth. Answering these questions can clarify certain sequences of processes or behavior, and this is the contribution we typically expect from scientific approaches. At a certain point another type of why-question emerges: "Why did I go into the street? Because I wanted to visit a friend." This is not a causal "why?" but a *teleological*

"why?" I went in the street with the goal or end (*telos*) of visiting a friend. In other words, this meaningful goal motivated my going into the street. In the application of knowledge, these two types of why-questions and their answers are both relevant. Generally, we don't apply technology wherever we can: we don't build bridges everywhere or at arbitrary places, but where we want to cross a river. And we don't operate on anyone who comes near a hospital, but try to overcome or mitigate specific sufferings. The causal knowledge must be led by considerations of meaningful uses, otherwise we do not know what to do with all our equipment.

Besides questions about the meanings of intentions there are also why-questions that touch the core of the wisdom traditions: how to understand and approach the possible meanings of situations that are typical for the interhuman condition, such as suffering or loss. Even conditions that we cannot change or did not choose do not have to *remain* meaningless. They should at least be *dignified* and, if possible, meaningfully integrated in our lives and in society. Can some harmful event that strikes us as utterly meaningless still ever be or become meaningful? How we can continue to live in a meaningful way when we are confronted with inevitable and in themselves meaningless processes of senescing, being in pain, or dying? These are serious and heavy questions that will often find no answer that will allow us to accept what happened. One way to find an answer can be illustrated by the following example. I got stuck in a railway station a hundred miles away from home because there was some kind of mechanical problem. This was in itself a meaningless occurrence that I could not change, but it got some meaning when my wife brought the car to pick me up because this reaffirmed the care we have for each other. When a family member gets a severe disease—which is in itself a terrible and meaningless event—it derives meaning when the family takes care of him and uses the unwanted opportunity to reaffirm their love for each other in the way they care for him. This kind of meaning is not organized or guaranteed by "nature," "fate," or the "cosmos" but comes from interhuman presence and care. It begins with acknowledging the realities of life and asking "How can we approach this in a meaningful way?" Often, this question will reveal its meaning when we try to find the answers. This does not mean that mechanical problems that disturb transportation are meaningful, or that becoming seriously ill is meaningful in itself: only our response can give these situations some meaning. Caring for a dying person can be experienced as a precious time, although we would have given anything to avoid his or her

death. However, even sincerely trying to find meaning in a situation does not grant us control. When there is no meaningful response, the meaninglessness of life as "a fact" or as "something that occurs" stares us in the face.

The question "Why do we age?" can be taken up in evolutionary terms (narrowing "aging" to "senescing"), trying to answer it in terms of "disposable soma" (Kirkwood 1991) or similar theories. We can also try to approach this question in a way that acknowledges processes of senescing but sees them in a broader perspective of human aging. One answer worth considering is that aging gives us the opportunity to attain some distance from our earlier lives so that we can appreciate what we have been trying to achieve with all our energy or what we failed to do. At a cultural level, the meaning of aging could be that it gives us the opportunity to appreciate that the interhuman condition is deeply characterized by and dependent on intergenerational bonds and that such profound interconnections shape our history, present and future. These meanings are not pre-given but require an active, meaningful commitment.

Is It Good to Live Longer?

Whereas Cicero maintained that it would be good to become old and to get a taste of what he considered to be the specific pleasures of "old age," Epicurus and Stoic philosophers such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius would say that it doesn't matter: we can only live or lose the *present,* and since we will be dead for an eternity, a short or a long life are not really different. However, these philosophers develop their argument from a perspective of eternity, whereas one can argue that from a perspective *within* life, and with regard for the persons concerned, it does matter whether you can reap the fruits of your work or see your children grow up (Williams 1973). In this sense, there can be intense satisfaction in becoming older. Moreover, if life has pleasures to offer—and it does—enjoying them for a long time is better than for a shorter time, other things being equal.

If we could live, let's say, three times longer: would that be something to strive for? A first answer must be that the question how long a life lasts in chronometric terms is not the same as the question of whether life is "good." *The Guinness Book of Records* may be an impressive collection of the longest, highest, heaviest, and fastest, but this collection does not satisfy questions regarding beauty or meaningfulness: a longer life is not always a better life. Generally, we can say that death can come too early but also too late: "If that is any sort of dilemma, it can, as things still are and if one is exceptionally

lucky, be resolved, not by doing anything, but just by dying shortly before the horrors of not doing so become evident. . . . Technological progress may, in more than one direction, make that piece of luck rarer" (Williams 1973, 100). It should be added, however, that technology in a broad sense (including sanitation, antibiotics, and surgery) has also helped us not to die too early; the question is still how to use these instruments in a meaningful way.

A problematic assumption that has accompanied many discussions and fantasies about living much longer is that one would be the *only* one to live that long. The fictive examples of extremely long lives that have captured the imagination in contemporary literature such as the thirteenth-century Italian count in Simone de Beauvoir's 1992 novel *All Men are Mortal,* who suffered from the curse of not being able to die, or the fate of Elina Makropulos in the novel-based opera by Janacek, are all lonely survivors. Their problems are not caused by long-term decline: Elina continues to have the energy and vitality of a 42-year-old, but after three hundred years of artificial longevity, she does not want to prolong her life anymore—not because she would be "just too bored with herself " but because she lost everybody she loved again and again. But would this situation not be different if her fellow humans also lived comparably long? It seems to me that the isolation of these long-lived protagonists is an important factor in not wanting to live any further, not the sheer number of years.

Bernard Williams (1973) states that he would be bored if life would last much longer: "I would eventually have had altogether too much of myself." And, he adds, "an endless life would be a meaningless life." But this last remark introduces another confusion that is often encountered in these debates: a much longer life is not the same as an endless life; it still remains *finite.* Moreover, we do already live longer and must not assume a priori that persons who live for a hundred years and more must bore themselves to death. Thomas Nagel (1975) could not imagine that he would eventually tire of life, and Christine Overall (2003) agrees: she argues that one should not underestimate the possibilities of a long life in terms of changing experiences and challenges. She points out that many objections to the idea of living much longer have ageist assumptions, doubting, for example, if it would be possible to continue a meaningful and interesting life after a certain age, or believing that a longer life would necessarily amount to a prolonged decline or prolonged static dementia as portrayed by the Struldbrugs in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* The question of whether it would be good to live much longer depends on the

quality of such a life: if life is good and remains good, there would indeed be no reasons to oppose attempts to prolong it.

Overall (2003) mainly objects to the social costs of extremely long lives and the blatant inequality in comparison with those who cannot afford the continuous costly repairs such long lives would demand. This is indeed a strong moral argument that we could raise against attempts to engineer substantially prolonged human life spans (Derkx 2009). Moreover, the contemporary problems regarding a meaningful and dignified integration of aged persons in society will not be solved by extending their lives; the one-sided attention for *longer* lives is a typical example of a chronometric approach to aging. Birthdays may be celebrated, but meanwhile arbitrary divisions are created between people who would still be "normal" and those who, for no other reason than their age, should be seen as "aged" or "older." To oppose this tendency, we must maintain that the fundamental questions are not about the *length* of life but about its *quality.* And this quality can only be decided from within specific situations of life and with regard to specific persons whose opinions matter regardless of their ages.

Many older persons who have found possibilities to remain working are flourishing in their careers and undoubtedly many more would still be capable of participating in challenging work. The argument that the future of older people would typically be too short to occupy a position of importance is belied by the numerous persons who continue to function well in their area of expertise even when they are in their eighties: politicians such as Nelson Mandela; philosophers such as Gadamer, Bertrand Russell, Paul Ricoeur, and Habermas; artists such as Picasso or Casals.. When they became 50 or 60 and were defined as "old," they still had many years ahead to devote to activities that were important not only to them but to others as well. Should they have withdrawn and spent their time on "senior activities"? Although such activities may please some, it is not only a matter of the different choices that people make: too often aging persons are confronted with a society that does not take them seriously any more.

This does not, however, imply that everybody must remain active in the sense of having a career. It often seems as if the essence of what life has to offer coincides with the *work* somebody does or could have done during his life. This is an overstatement of the importance of work and a consequence of seeing life as a career. It neglects not only those who are unable to have a career but also other meaningful activities and the receptivity of life. Some

experiences may have a deeper impact and can be more rewarding than the satisfaction that comes from completing successful projects or a career. At this point we may recall Margaret Urban Walker's remarks about the limited idea of a "typical male" linear career compared to the work many women do: "the sort of work that never 'goes anywhere,' in terms of social status, occupational importance, or increasing economic power" (Walker 1999, 105; see 1.3). The sort of work Walker refers to may, however, give a deeper satisfaction than many highly competitive careers, perhaps one of the reasons many women continue their commitment to work in caregiving even when the material rewards are absent or less than might be expected.

The traditional connection between aging and wisdom also points beyond the career-oriented activism that governs much of "normal" adulthood to more long-term reflective approaches and to an extension of life that is different from its usual meaning of longer duration. Aging people should not be the only ones who take time to reflect on the ways in which societies can use their cultural and material resources, but the short-term time perspectives that have become predominant in the central domains of late modern society hardly tolerate time perspectives that transcend the short-term targets that block temporal horizons. To attain intergenerational or transgenerational perspectives that are more than the usual demographic extrapolations requires a certain distance from the cultural idealization of instrumental activism. However, since reflective orientations have little status in late modernity, even retirees tend to cling to full agendas and to their past expertise. William Thomas recounts in his book *What Are Old People For?* (2007) a story about his meeting with the executive director of a retirement community, who told him that every morning a handful of men from the community would line up outside her office to present a complaint or criticism. Her impression was that these persons wanted above all to be recognized for their professional expertise. Typically, they would say something like: "I was an engineer for John Deere for forty-five years, and I am telling you that you will have a major problem if you don't follow my advice." The point of this story is that even retired people still want to be recognized for being the experts they were, as if technical expertise and information are all that counts. It seems as if the dignity or worth of older persons is still measured by the goals and achievements of "normal" adults who appear to possess a monopoly of the things and activities that really matter.

Of course, aging persons can remain interested in the kind of work they did,

and they should speak up to guard their interests like other citizens. But this should not exclude ways to transcend such instrumental activities by turning their attention to issues that have been central to the wisdom traditions. Lars Tornstam (1997) has proposed that there is a "natural" tendency toward transcendence in aging people, a "Gerotranscendence" that leads them to withdraw from the activities and contacts that they have come to see as superficial and turn to more spiritual subjects such as an increased interest in the universe and one's place within it. But transcendence in aging could also have something to do with attempts to pass on to the next generation what one has come to consider the most important things he or she has learned or experienced in life. In this context Erikson (1950) coined the term *generativity:* "the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation." Initially, this idea was hardly noticed when it was brought forward in a book called *Childhood and Society.* The concept known as "identity crisis" drew much more of the readers' attention than the remarks he made on the stages of development and the tasks he associated with the subsequent stages of life. Erikson's concept of generativity is an important broadening of the dominant views on intergenerational transfers such as we see spun out in the many governmental reports about the graying populations, which deal with the financing of education for the young, the costs of pensions, and care for "the aged." A feeling of responsibility for the future can also lead to the wish to transfer to young people what someone has ultimately come to consider as most important or inspiring. At the same time, Erikson assumed that the wish to clarify for oneself what such an inspiring inheritance could be might be an important "developmental task" for those who have retired from the front lines of social life but are still concerned about the quality of human lives and what they could contribute to that (Erikson 1950, 267; Kotre 1996; 1999).

As he was approaching his eightieth birthday, the theologian Karl Rahner (1980) remarked in his reflections on aging that one of the most important things would be for him to continue to participate in meetings with other people with self-confidence and modesty. He wished to avoid the traps of self-pity or the easy superiority of "I have heard all this before" or a proud refusal because "they didn't want me anymore, so now they cannot have me anymore." Aging people could make an important contribution to their societies if they find new ways of realizing their traditional roles as thoughtful commentators and advisors.

Another inspiring contribution to aging in a transgenerational perspective

can be distilled from Richard Rorty's (1999) view of *moral progress* involving a switch from metaphors of *vertical* distance to metaphors of *horizontal* extent—a matter, not of feeling elevated or put down in relation to younger people, but of extending a wider and wider circle of sympathy and concern about *other* people. Such a transgenerational perspective also includes intergenerational concerns: being interested in the lives of small children, adolescents, and "normal" adults who tend to isolate themselves in their age groups unless family ties bring them in contact with each other at family gatherings. If we turn the tables around, it might become clear that the so-called normal adults are actually, for many reasons, isolating themselves in their short-term perspectives without finding the time to address transgenerational issues such as sustainability or a more harmonious interrelation of cultures as well as smaller-scale issues such as the accessibility of buildings and cities or the safety of environments. Some of these problems will be seen as typically important for the aged, but often their solution will improve the social and intergenerational climate for all concerned.

Rather than trusting a hidden steering from within the ripening organism, as Thornstam (1997) seems to suggest, there is a need for an intentionally cultivated culture of aging that can integrate and support the changing competences of aging persons in late modern societies, thus giving exemplary form to aging as a phase of life that is worth living, beyond consumerist perspectives. In that way, aging can still be something to look forward to and to respect without getting lost in intergenerational quarrels.

To participate in horizons and projects that transcend individual plans can give a profound meaning to such activities. Often career-oriented persons make the transition to such transpersonal orientations in later life. The philosopher Bertrand Russell paints an interesting picture: "An individual human existence should be like a river—small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past boulders and over waterfalls. Gradually, the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea and painlessly lose their individual being" (1951, 210). It is a variation of old cultural images about a transcendence of individualism as individual lives participate like finite drops in infinite oceans of life beyond the scopes of planning and activist agendas.

Aging can also be an invitation to embrace goals that extend further than one's own life so that a meaningful participation is possible until the end.

Death is the end of life but not its goal. However, aging is not only a matter of projects but also of a deeper receptivity—a new openness of experiencing, giving, and receiving. A beautiful image of such a development is the late flight of the owl of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. A bird with big eyes full of curiosity that see best where the light is not too flashy, the owl flies out when evening falls.

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